**Challenges**

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# Challenges

by Capsicle2013

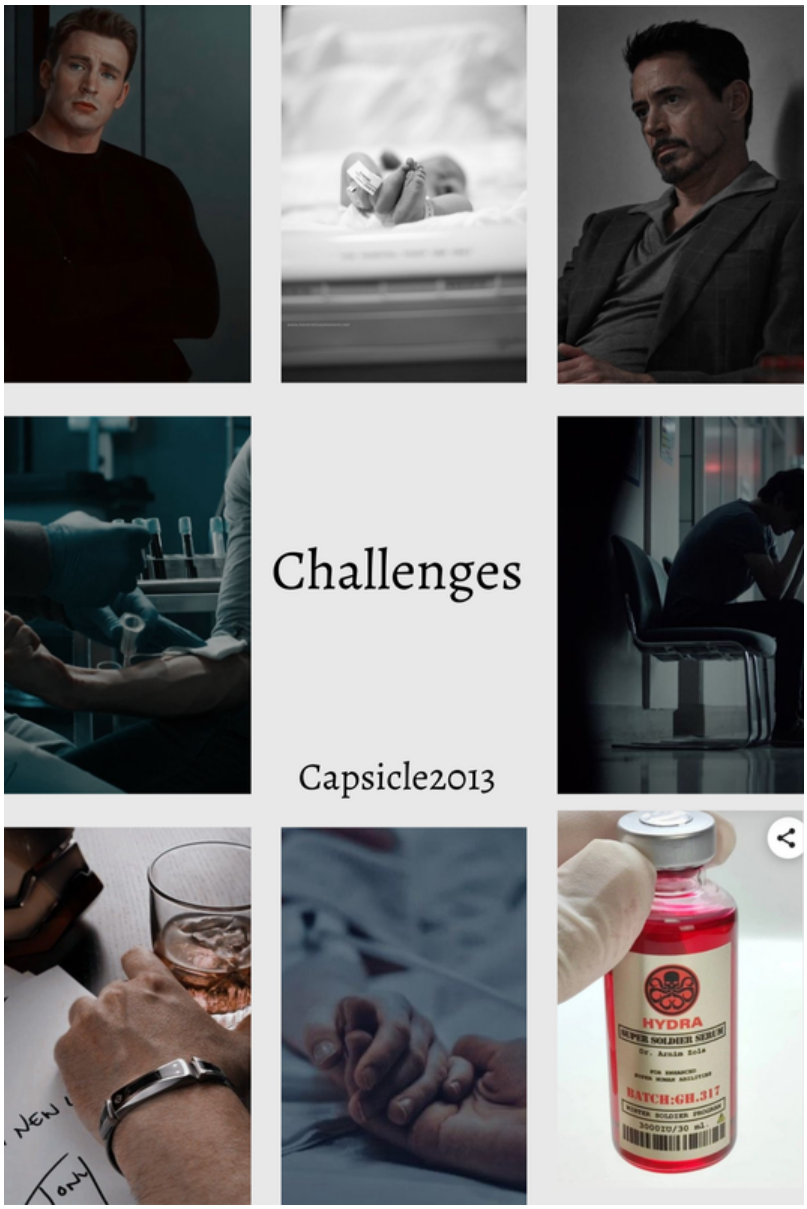
Summary

Steve and Tony are excited to be expecting their first child. But when Steve's pregnancy becomes unexpectedly difficult, they realize their journey into parenthood is going to be a lot harder than they thought.

Notes

I'm in the mood for pregnant Steve and difficult pregnancy! I know I've written one years ago but I want to do it again! Also I think someone from tumblr asked for one so if you're reading this I'm excited to share this with you, and of course everyone else!

# Chapter 1




Steve slowly pulls himself off the bathroom floor, his body protesting, too tired and weak to move. But he forces himself anyway, not wanting Tony to wake up and find him on the floor. Steve didn't want Tony to find out how bad his morning sickness has truly been. Tony was already stressed about the news of them becoming parents, leading him to become a little clingy. It's a lot and some days Steve feels suffocated, but he knows his husband means well.

Having a baby was both an exciting and nerve-wracking time. For one they didn't think they could even conceive a child. It had been an accident, but Steve doesn't regret it. He's always wanted a family, and for a while he thought he'd never get one of his own. But then he met

and fell in love with Tony, and realized Tony was the one Steve wanted to start a family and new life with.

Steve just didn't think pregnancy would be this hard. He's still early into his pregnancy—around eight weeks. The first physician he met with informed him that everything seemed normal and he had nothing to worry about. He left that appointment feeling relieved and excited. He and Tony agreed to wait until after he passed his first trimester to tell the team. It was better to be safe than sorry.

But now he wishes he had someone to talk to. The first person he should tell is Tony. Tony assured him that he would be there no matter what and he'd do anything to make sure Steve and their baby were okay. But Steve is still worried, not wanting to cause anymore stress to his husband.

It was fine. This would pass. Just a few more weeks and he'd be okay and feeling like himself. At least, that's what he constantly hopes for.

Steve cleans up and staggers out of the bathroom, stealing a glance at his husband, relieved to find him still asleep. It's tempting to curl up beside him and get some sleep, but with the way his stomach continues to churn, Steve decides to sleep downstairs where he knows he can't bother Tony.

Most of the night is spent with him making trips to the guest bathroom, emptying his stomach until there's nothing left and all he is able to do is dry heave. He tries to drink water, but even that is difficult to keep down.

After another grueling round, Steve returns to the couch, his stomach still upset and his body drained. He pulls the blanket up to his chin, his eyelids growing heavy. He's finally able to fall asleep.

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Steve wakes up to the sensation of someone shaking him. His eyes shoot open and he gasps, only to relax when he realizes Tony is sitting beside him. He looks concerned, his brows furrowed and Steve hates that he's the reason why Tony is worried.

"Hey, it's just me," Tony says, his voice soft and calm. "You good?"

Steve nods and collapses back, his eyes falling shut. "What time is it?" He asks, rubbing at his aching head.

"Eightish. Why'd you sleep down here? Was I snoring again?" Tony chuckles.

Steve shakes his head, immediately regretting it when his head throbs. "Sorry. I couldn't sleep and didn't want to wake you."

"I figured. Is it Peanut?" Tony lays a hand over Steve's belly. "What did they do this time?"

"I felt a little nauseous last night. It's nothing," Steve replies and makes an attempt to sit up. His vision blurs, a spell of dizziness washing over him for a moment.

“Hmm.” Tony frowns. “I know the doc said that was normal but…it’s just a few more weeks, right?”

“Yeah, not too bad. Then maybe when I’m up to it we can tell our friends.”

“Speaking of. They’re waiting for us downstairs. Sam offered to make everyone breakfast.”

Just the thought of food makes Steve queasy all over again. “Okay…”

“Yeah. Nat said he’s making biscuits and gravy or something, so I said we’d—”

“Stop talking.” Steve begs, his hand flying out to grip Tony’s shoulder. “It’s making me sick.”

“All I said was biscuits and—”

Steve gags and cups his mouth. Tony mutters a curse and frantically looks around for something for Steve to spew in. He rushes into the bathroom and returns a few minutes later with the trash bin, thrusting it near Steve.

Steve grips it tight and looks into it, emitting a small groan when his stomach continues to churn. “Can I skip breakfast? I don’t think I can eat.”

“You can’t skip it. At least eat something small. It’s not good for you and the baby,” Tony says, rubbing Steve’s back soothingly.

“God, this sucks.”

“I know, I know. I can make you some tea. Do you want me to cancel meeting up with them?”

Steve shakes his head. “I can’t have them suspect anything.”

“If you show up looking like this they’re gonna suspect something.”

“I just need a minute.”

Tony nods. “Okay.” He rubs Steve’s back a little longer, then he rises to his feet. “I’ll make you that tea.”

“Thank you,” Steve says softly, squeezing his eyes shut when the queasiness refuses to dissipate.

After finishing most of his tea and being able to keep it down, Steve agrees to go down to the common room to mingle with their friends. He quickly comes to regret that decision when the elevator doors open and he’s smacked in the face with the strong stench of coffee and eggs. He hasn’t been able to stand coffee since he found out he was pregnant; it was the first indication that something was wrong when Tony made a pot and Steve was forced to rush to the bathroom. Tony agreed to not drink coffee around him anymore.

“I won’t drink any, I promise,” Tony assures, taking Steve by the hand and leading him over to the sofas where their friends are chatting.

“It’s okay. Just don’t kiss for the rest of the day,” Steve says softly to him.

“I’d rather give up the coffee than the kisses, sweetheart.”

Natasha spots them first and she waves them over, scooting over and making room for Steve. Tony heads toward the kitchen where Sam is still preparing breakfast, promising to get Steve some water and something light to eat.

“Morning sleepyhead,” Natasha greets when Steve sits down beside her. “You never sleep in.”

Steve does his best to ignore the suspicious look she sends him. “I didn’t sleep well last night.”

“What’s up?” Bucky asks, frowning. “You don’t look so good, pal.”

If anyone was going to realize he was sick, it would be Bucky. Steve spent a majority of his life sick with something, and it had always been Bucky trying to nurse him back to health.

Steve forces a smile. “I’m fine, Buck.”

Luckily no one mentions his appearance again and Steve carries on as usual, doing his best to appear as normal as he possibly can. Tony returns to his side, offering Steve some water and toast. Steve smiles, appreciating Tony looking out for him.

“There’s more food than that over here!” Sam calls out, gesturing to the abundance of food with his spatula.

Steve turns to face Sam, shooting him a smile. “In a minute. Thanks for making breakfast by the way.”

“It’s surprisingly really good,” Bucky says, returning to his spot with a plate full of food.

Steve eyes the plate, his stomach acting up at the unappealing look of a biscuit smothered in a white gravy.

“Yeah. Looks good,” Steve forces out.

Tony leans in close and whispers. “You okay?”

Steve nods and takes Tony’s hand. “I’ll be fine. Just a few more weeks, right?”

Tony smiles and lifts Steve’s hand up to his lips, kissing it. “You got this.”

Steve appreciates the encouragement, but as the morning carries on and he continues to feel worse, he wonders if Tony’s right. Can he really get through the next few weeks? He supposes he doesn’t have much of a choice.

He catches Bucky’s eye again and he smiles softly at him, but all he gets in return is a frown. He glances away, praying Bucky doesn’t ask. He wasn’t ready to reveal his secret yet.

# Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Thank you all so much for reading and leaving kudos and kind comments! I'm so excited about this story! I just love me some Steve whump and him being cared for! It's about damn time someone cared for him!

Steve shuts his eyes and leans back against the pillows, the queasy feeling in his gut refusing to let up. He's been in bed most of the day due to nausea and fatigue. He couldn't even get up to do his usual morning run. All he wants to do is stay in bed and rest.

He thought for sure he would be feeling somewhat better by now. He still had a couple more weeks until he passed the first trimester, and he hopes by then he's able to bounce back and start feeling like himself. He can't imagine going through his whole pregnancy feeling as miserable as he does now.

"Knock, knock." Tony gently taps his knuckles against the doorframe, poking his head in. "How are you feeling?"

"Like the Hulk just smashed me," Steve replies, followed by a groan and he closes his eyes again, trying to breathe before he ends up puking.

Tony winces and steps into the room, taking a seat beside Steve. "That bad, huh? You do look a little pale. Do you want to try eating again?"

Steve shakes his head, grimacing at the thought of food. "I just want to sleep."

"And you can, but I think you should try eating. You and the baby need the nutrients."

"I guess I'll try the crackers. Can you bring me some ginger ale?"

Tony smiles softly and affectionately runs his fingers through Steve's hair. "Anything for you, sweetheart. Just let me know what else you need."

"I guess putting me out of my misery is out of the question, huh?" Steve jokes.

Tony frowns. "I'm not gonna do that. You're gonna be fine, honey. Right now our little baby is a big pain in the ass. I'm sure they'll grow out of it. Wait…they probably won't. God, wait until they start talking back and acting rebellious."

Steve chuckles lightly and reaches for Tony's hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. "You're thinking too far ahead, Tones. Let me at least grow this baby first, hmm?"

“True. Which, by the way, you’re doing an amazing job. I know you look and feel like death right now but you’re still amazing.”

Steve smiles and he leans in to kiss Tony, only for Tony’s words to register and he pulls away, his smile replaced with a frown. “You think I look like death?”

“So ginger ale, right?” Tony leaps off the bed and rushes toward the door to avoid an argument.

Steve rolls his eyes and grabs a pillow, throwing it at Tony and hitting him in the back of the head. “Jerk.”

Tony just chuckles and blows Steve a kiss, then he quickly leaves before Steve decides to throw something else at him.

Steve shakes his head and sinks back into the pillows, suddenly feeling exhausted all over again. He pulls the comforter up, his eyelids growing heavy now that he’s warm and comfortable. It doesn’t take long for him to drift off.

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The nausea is getting worse and Steve’s lost count of how many times he’s spent his days near the bathroom or curled up on the couch with a trash bin within reach.

That’s where he finds himself now—curled up on the couch with a blanket and his trusty trash bin beside him. He’s barely touched the crackers and toast Tony gave him before he had to leave. Steve wishes Tony didn’t have to work and could stay home with him all day, but Tony promised he’d be home soon.

Steve groans when his belly cramps and his lower back spasms. He mutters a curse and wraps his arms around himself, his eyes squeezed shut and teeth gritting as he waits for it to pass.

“Shit,” he whimpers when the pain becomes more uncomfortable. He blows out a slow, steady breath and rolls onto his side, hoping a change in position might help alleviate the pain.

He contemplates calling Tony, but he doesn’t want to bother him and risk getting him in trouble. The morning sickness and cramps were normal, and all Steve had to do was wait it out. There was no point in complaining to his husband about it. It wasn’t going to do any good anyway.

After a while the couch becomes uncomfortable, forcing Steve to get up and try going back to bed. He grabs his stack of crackers even though he knows he probably won’t even consume them. Going up the stairs is difficult; he’s tired and weak, needing to stop every free steps just to rest.

He finally makes it to the bedroom and he crawls into bed, his eyes falling shut the moment they hit the pillow, the exhaustion completely taking over.

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Steve awakes to the sound of someone at the door. He groans and rolls over onto his back, listening again, at first believing he dreamt it. But then he hears another knock, followed by JARVIS alerting Steve that Bucky was at the door.

He groans again and scrubs a hand over his face. “Why is he here?”

“Would you like me to tell him to come back at a better time, Captain?”

Steve shakes his head, regretting it when the motion causes a painful throb in his skull. “No…it could be important.”

With a huff, Steve throws the comforter off himself and slowly pulls himself out of bed, his vision blurring slightly when a wave of dizziness washes over him. He blindly reaches for the bed, using it to steady himself until the dark spots dancing around his vision fades.

Bucky’s knocks become more urgent and Steve moves as quickly as he can to get downstairs, suddenly worried that something might be wrong.

He moves down the stairs as quickly as he can, only for his body to protest. The dizziness hits him hard and this time he can’t compose himself. He misses a step, his body tumbling down the rest of the stairs until he hits the bottom with a painful groan.

Steve’s eyes well with tears, his entire body throbbing in pain. He lifts his head slightly to inspect for any damage, but gives up when his vision grows fuzzy, and he lies back down, his eyes struggling to stay open.

He hears the door open and Bucky’s hurried footsteps coming toward him. “Oh God, Steve!” Bucky drops down beside him and slides his arm under Steve’s head to help prop him up. “Hey, it’s okay. It’s okay.”

“Buck?” Steve winces and he grabs Bucky’s metal hand to squeeze it. “Everything hurts.”

“What happened? Where’s Tony?”

“Work…I felt…dizzy…”

“Okay, okay. Just hang on. JARVIS alerted the medical team.”

“Bucky, the baby. Oh God…the baby…”

Bucky frowns. “What?”

Steve grips Bucky’s hand harder, the tears finally escaping and rolling down his face as he begins to fear the worst. He’d never live with himself if he did something to harm his baby.

“It’s okay, pal,” Bucky assures. “You’re gonna be okay.”

Steve can only hope Bucky is right.

# Chapter 3

Tony paces back and forth in his office, unable to sit still and focus on his work. He has a meeting in an hour and contracts that need his signature in order to move business deals forward, but none of that matters to him now. All he can think about is Steve.

The moment he left the compound to come into the city for work, he felt extremely guilty. He should be at home with his husband and taking care of him. Steve was still dealing with bad morning sickness and constantly feeling tired and drained. All of the books said it was normal symptoms and that they would pass, but Tony couldn't help but worry anyway.

He knew absolutely nothing about pregnancy and babies, especially a pregnant super soldier. It's never happened before, and he often wonders if the complications are truly normal or due to Steve's enhanced body.

Tony heaves out a sigh and plops down in his chair, his eyes drifting over to the mini bar across the room. He vowed to quit drinking when Steve announced that they were expecting. He didn't want to be drinking around his child. He even decided to slow down with work just so he could be around. The last thing he wants is to end up like his old man.

But the more he thinks about Steve and the pregnancy and the thought of becoming a father soon, he can't help but pour himself a drink. He just needs a little something to take the edge off.

He brings his glass up to his lips right as Pepper walks through the door. She eyes the glass of whiskey and then looks at him, then she sighs loudly.

"Really?" She gestures to the glass in his hand. He wonders if she'll storm over and take it from him. It wouldn't be the first time.

Tony rolls his eyes and takes a drink. "What? It's been a stressful day."

"You really want to talk about stress? I've been running around all morning because you decided to show up late—"

"I have a good reason for showing up late."

"This should be good."

Tony opens his mouth to respond, only to shut it when he fails to come up with a good excuse. He couldn't tell her that Steve was sick because that would draw a lot of unwanted attention. Steve was insistent about them waiting to tell their friends about the baby until after the first trimester. Tony wouldn't dare go against his wishes just to cover his ass.

Pepper rolls her eyes. "I knew it. Just please sign those documents and prepare for the meeting. I'm not covering for you again."

“Fine, I guess I have no choice huh?”

Before Pepper can come up with a reply, an alert to his watch captures his attention. Tony glances down, frowning when he sees it’s from JARVIS. He taps on his watch and speaks into it.

“J, what’s up?”

“Sir, Captain Rogers is in the medbay.”

Tony looks up, connecting his eyes with Pepper’s long enough to catch the worry that flashes across her face. He turns away and brings his wrist up to his mouth to respond back.

“Is this about…you know…”

“He fell down the stairs.”

“Oh shit. I’ll be right there, okay? God. He’s alright though?”

“He’s stable but is asking for you.”

“I’m on my way.”

Tony spins around to face Pepper again. “Sorry but I have to go. Family emergency.”

“Is everything okay? What happened?”

“Steve took a little tumble down the stairs. I’m gonna head back to the compound to make sure he’s okay.”

Pepper nods. “Of course. I’ll cancel the meeting. Keep me posted.”

“Will do,” Tony says, then he quickly rushes out of the room, his heart racing. “Please be okay,” he whispers to himself.

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Tony makes his way through the corridors of the medical ward, his mind wandering and the anxiety he’s been feeling since he received the call only getting worse. JARVIS hadn’t said anything about the state of the baby. Tony knows he should’ve asked but a part of him was too scared to. He couldn’t imagine learning they’ve lost the baby.

He approaches Steve’s private room, getting a glance of his husband and Bucky sitting beside him from the large glass window. He opens the door, his heart shattering at the sight of Steve lying in the bed with various wires connecting him to the nearby machines.

“Hey,” Tony greets, moving faster now that he’s just within reach of Steve. He reaches his bedside and leans in to kiss him. “I came as soon as I could,” he says, taking Steve’s hand. “What happened?”

“I fell down the stairs,” Steve replies with a weak smile.

Tony heaves out a sigh. “How did that even happen?”

Bucky supplies an answer, “He wasn’t answering his phone so went by to check on him. I found him at the bottom of the stairs.”

“I’m glad you were there. Jesus. I knew I should’ve gotten you that Life Alert.”

Steve chuckles from the joke, only to wince and hiss in pain. “Sorry. It hurts to laugh and… move.”

Tony pulls up a chair beside Steve and grabs his hand again. “What did the doc say? You break anything?”

Steve shakes his head. “No, thank God. I did mess up my shoulder and my sides are pretty bruised.”

“Okay.” Tony nods, absorbing the information. “It could’ve been worse. At least we know the serum will clear this up soon. How’s…” Tony steals a glance at Bucky, then back to Steve. “I take it he knows?”

Steve nods his head. “Yeah. I told him about the baby.”

“Why didn’t you say anything before?” Bucky asks. “I knew you were hiding something, punk.”

“I wanted to wait. I promise I was gonna say something in a couple of weeks,” Steve replies.

“We can wait to tell the rest of the team if you want. Barnes, don’t say anything or I’m taking the arm,” Tony threatens.

Bucky huffs and leans back in his chair. “Fine. But you know Nat’s gonna figure it out. And I should probably tell Sam. I don’t keep things from my fiancé.”

Tony rolls his eyes and turns back to Steve, his expression softening. “It’s gonna be okay. You and the baby are fine and we just need to be a little more cautious.”

“Yeah.” Steve nods in agreement. He sighs heavily and lays a hand over his belly. “I’m just glad the baby’s okay.”

“I’m glad you both are.” Tony smiles and brings Steve’s hand up to his lips, pressing a kiss to his knuckles.

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The pain isn’t the worst thing he’s felt in his life, but it makes getting around uncomfortable. Steve’s thankful he has Tony to help him around the apartment, but a part of him feels guilty and like a burden. The doctor said the bruises would heal soon, but that was days ago and Steve’s ribs and back are still badly bruised and sore. His right shoulder is in worse condition, making completing simple tasks extremely difficult and agonizing.

“Ow! Tony!” Steve cries out and stops in his tracks, leaning against his husband for support. Tony had suggest Steve take a shower to help with the aches, but also to clean him up after he puked all over himself.

Steve grabs onto the bathroom wall with his good arm to steady himself, wincing when his whole body aches.

“Do you want to lie back down?” Tony asks.

Steve shakes his head. “It just hurts to move. I need a minute.”

“Did the nausea go away?”

“Kinda. I just…I feel so weak.”

“Okay, that’s good enough for me. I’ll help you back to bed.”

“No! I just…I'll shower. Just go slow, okay?”

Tony carefully helps Steve into the shower, not even bothered about how soaked he’s getting. Steve is ready to ask him to just join him, but the dizziness returns, making him just want to get in and out.

“Just hold onto me,” Tony instructs when he notices Steve sway. “Hold onto the wall with your good arm. I’ll mak this quick.”

Steve nods and uses the wall to hold himself up. He leans forward and presses his forehead against the cool tiled wall, letting the hot water cascade down his back. Tony carefully runs the wash cloth over Steve’s back, a sad sigh escaping him when he notices the big ugly bruises that decorate his skin.

Steve picks up the sound and he tries to crane his neck to look at Tony. “Are they getting better?”

“Not really. I thought the serum would’ve done something by now,” Tony replies.

“It usually does.” Steve winces and lets out a groan. “It hurts. I wish I never fell down those damns stairs.”

“I know. I’m gonna see if I can work from home or something for a while. I am the boss after all. I just don’t want you getting hurt.” Tony grabs the bottle of shampoo and moves onto the scrubbing Steve’s scalp, pulling a small moan from him. He grins. “Bet that feels nice, huh?”

“Yeah. If I wasn’t so banged up I’d ask for another massage. My shoulder is killing me.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

Tony finishes up, then he shuts off the water and carefully helps Steve out of the shower. He lets go of Steve for a second so he can grab the fluffy blue towel, then once he has it wrapped around Steve, he leads him out of the bathroom and into their room.

“Easy, easy,” Tony says softly, carefully lowering Steve down onto the bed. “Better?”

Steve shakes his head. “It still hurts.”

“All I can give you is Tylenol.”

“That doesn’t work.”

Tony sighs. “I know.”

“This will get better, right? I can’t keep doing this for months.”

“The morning sickness is supposed to be normal–”

“This doesn’t seem normal,” Steve interrupts.

“Let’s see if it improves. If it doesn’t…”

“Then what?”

Tony hesitates for a moment, then he lets out a sad sigh. “Then we need to decide if you should continue on with the pregnancy.”

Steve’s heart shatters at those words. He never wanted to believe that terminating his pregnancy was going to be an option for them. The pregnancy had been unplanned, but they still wanted to go through with it and have a baby. Steve never thought it was going to be this rough on him, but he didn’t want to give up. Not yet.

“Don’t think like that. I…I want this baby.”

“Hey,” Tony says softly and sits down beside Steve. “I do, too. I just…I hate seeing you like this. I don’t want you to feel this miserable or get worse.”

“I know. Let’s just see if I improve,” Steve says, taking Tony’s hand to give it a reassuring squeeze.

Tony nods. “Okay.”

# Chapter 4

Sooner or later Steve knew he was going to need to face his friends. He hasn't left the apartment in a few days, and whenever his friends asked about him, he had Tony tell them that he was still recovering from the fall. It wasn't a total lie; he was still achy and tired, and the bruises covering his skin have yet to fully fade. It bothers Tony, that much Steve can tell, and if he's being honest, it bothers him a little bit too.

The serum is supposed to come through and heal him like it has in the past, and yet it appears to be working slowly on him. Every day Steve wakes up to find that his body still hurts and still has bruises. They're not as dark, and a few of the smaller ones have changed color, but the larger ones are still ugly and tender.

Steve slowly lifts up his shirt to inspect his side, frowning when he finds the large bruise. He knows better than to touch it, so he leaves it alone. He tries to get a good look at his back, and when he looks in the mirror, he's met with the same thing. With a sigh he pulls his shirt down and exits the bathroom.

Tony is sitting at the dining table with a cup of coffee and a few important looking documents. Ever since the fall, Tony has been glued to Steve's side. He refused to go back to his office and if he was needed for work, he had Pepper handle it or he'd work from home. Steve appreciates having his husband around, but at the same time he can't help but feel guilty for making Tony worried.

Steve comes up behind him and wraps his arms around his neck, kissing his cheek. Tony melts into his touch and reaches back to rub Steve's arm.

"How did you sleep?" Tony asks, craning his neck to look at Steve.

"Fine," Steve says with a shrug and he pulls away, his stomach grumbling slightly. He's wary when it comes to eating, but for once he doesn't feel so nauseous.

"I made coffee. I can make you breakfast," Tony says and makes an attempt to get up, but Steve waves him off.

"I got it. You look busy."

Tony heaves out a sigh and leans back in his seat, scrubbing a hand over his face. "Just a lot of contracts I have to go over."

"You could take a break," Steve says as he begins to scramble up some eggs.

"Maybe I will. Do you have any plans today?"

"Besides lying in bed all day? I don't think so."

"We can hang out with the team. I know they miss you."

“Yeah.” Steve nods and he peers over at Tony. “I think we should. I know we said we’d wait to tell them but…I don’t know. I think I want to tell them now. Bucky’s the only one who knows.”

“He probably told Sam.”

“True. I might as well tell everyone else.” Steve turns away to finish up the eggs and prepare the bacon and toast.

“If you’re sure.”

“Yeah, I think…” Steve trails off, his ability to speak lost when the room begins to spin. He drops the spatula and uses both hands to grip the edge of the counter.

“Steve?” Tony rushes over and places a hand over his shoulder. But when Steve sways, Tony quickly holds onto him to keep him from falling. “Come on,” he says, urging Steve over to the dining table and lowering him down into a chair.

Steve hunches forward. “Sorry,” he mutters.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. I got dizzy.”

“I hate to say it but I think you should go back to bed. I’ll finish breakfast.” Tony ducks down to press a kiss to Steve’s head, then he takes over cooking the food.

Steve stays seated for a few minutes, watching with a hint of amusement as Tony nearly burns the bacon. He contemplates getting up to assist in someway, but when he makes an attempt to stand, he loses his balance and plops back down in the chair.

Maybe he should have stayed in bed.

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The elevator arrives and the doors open, revealing the common room and their friends already gathered for dinner. Steve steps out, swallowing hard when he is hit with the aroma the takeout gives off, his stomach churning. Tony is beside him, holding his hand, completely unaware of how sick Steve is feeling.

He doesn’t dare tell Tony that he’s on the verge of spewing his guts. He had already thrown up a few times already; luckily Tony only witnessed one of those times. Steve didn’t want to worry him or their friends, which is why he claimed he was well enough to have dinner with them and finally tell them about the baby.

“You doing okay?” Tony leans in and whispers.

Steve nods and forces a smile. “Just hungry.”

“Good because I ordered a lot of food.”

Steve takes a deep breath, only to regret it when he inhales what smells like parmesan cheese. He remembers Tony mentioning something about getting Italian as well as a few other cuisines. He doesn't have the heart to tell him how nauseous it makes him.

For the most part the evening goes well. Steve catches up with everyone and accepts their sympathy when they ask about what happened. He assures them he's fine, making sure to leave out the part about the slow healing. He doesn't need to worry them anymore than he already has.

When it comes time to finally eat, Steve struggles the most. He allows Tony to serve him a plate, unable to tell him not to pile it so high. He tried once, only for Tony to remind him that he's eating for two now. Steve nearly gags when Tony adds an extra helping of lasagna.

They sit around the table and chat while they share a meal. Steve sits between Nat and Tony, listening as Sam tells them a story from his childhood and being on his parents' boat. Steve gets dizzy just thinking about it.

From across the table he can feel eyes on him and he makes the mistake of looking up, meeting Bucky's concerned eyes. Steve forces a small smile, hoping it's enough to assure Bucky that he's fine, but when Bucky gestures with his head toward the kitchen and then gets up, Steve heaves out a sigh before following after him.

"You know I can tell whan you're lying, right?" Bucky says once they're both in the kitchen. Bucky grabs a few beers from the fridge, then he leans back against the counter. "What's going on?"

"Nothing. Just a little tired," Steve replies.

Buck scoffs and shakes his head. "You're a terrible liar."

"I'm still dealing with morning sickness. I don't want to say anything and freak everyone out. I'm fine."

"You'd tell us if you weren't, right? I don't want to find you like that again. It scared the hell out of me."

Steve smiles softly. "You won't. I'm gonna tell everyone now about the baby," he says, placing a hand over his belly.

Bucky's eyes follow and he grins. "I can't believe you're having a baby."

"Me neither. You excited to be an uncle?"

"What kind of question is that? Of course I'm excited!" Bucky throws an arm around Steve and they make their way back to their friends. He leans in and whispers, "You're naming the kid after me, right?"

Steve chuckles. "I'll put it on the list."

They return to their seats and Bucky hands Sam and Natasha the extra bottles of beer. Natasha frowns at Steve when she notices that he's not drinking.

"You don't want a beer?" she asks.

Steve shakes his head and reaches for his glass of water. "This is better."

Natasha raises a brow and looks over at Sam and Bucky, noticing the way they quickly look at anything but her.

"What's going on? You're all acting weird."

Tony chuckles and takes Steve's hand. "I guess we might as well tell them."

Steve smiles at Tony, then he turns to Nat. "We're having a baby."

Her mouth falls open in shock. The rest of the table breaks out in surprised gasps and congratulations. Natasha is the only one still in a state of shock.

After a few seconds she gathers herself. "You're serious? This isn't a joke, right? Because I know where you live."

Steve laughs. "Not a joke, Nat. I'm pregnant."

Natasha's face lights up and she throws her arms around Steve. "I get to be an auntie! This is so exciting! I can't believe you're—" she pauses and let's go of him, a frown etched on her face. "You ass!" She punches him lightly in the arm. "Why was I the last to know?"

Tony reaches over Steve to block any more hits. "Can we not hit my pregnant husband? Thank you."

"I'm fine," Steve assures, smiling softly at Tony. Then he turns back to Natasha. "I wanted to wait to tell everyone until I was ready. Bucky found out after the accident and then he told Sam—"

"I tell him everything." Bucky shrugs and takes a swig from his bottle.

"See? You can't be mad, Nat," Steve says.

"I'm not mad. I understand you wanting to wait. I'm very happy for you," she says, resting her head on his shoulder.

Tony cranes his neck to look at her. "And me?"

Natasha rolls her eyes, bunches up her napkin into a little ball and throws it at Tony's head.

---

There's a bit of relief knowing that his friends are aware of his pregnancy. Keeping a secret that big has been difficult, so now that he no longer has to keep the news to himself, he feels more at peace and excited to share the journey with his friends.

Well, parts of it.

Steve doesn't bring up the fact that he constantly feels sick. If anyone does catch on and ask, he tells them it's just morning sickness. He's not being completely untruthful; the morning sickness is still around, hitting him hard at all hours of the day. He doesn't want to believe that he's getting worse, not when he's so close to being done with the first trimester.

But as the hours turn into days and there's still no improvement, Steve starts to worry. He thinks about the conversation he had with Tony. The thought of terminating the pregnancy is one he never considered. The baby wasn't planned, but that didn't mean they didn't want to keep it and become parents. Steve pushes that idea aside, not wanting to think about it and dampen his spirits.

That thought doesn't cross his mind again until one night. He's where he always is: sitting on the bathroom floor with his head buried in the toilet. He's been vomiting for hours and nothing seems to be easing the nausea. The ginger ale Tony offered him settled his stomach for a little while, then it was back to vomiting.

Steve lurches forward again, emptying his stomach, or at least what's left anyway. He's already thrown up most of the dinner Tony picked up. He finally finishes and pulls away, his face flushed and sweaty.

"Tony!" He calls out when a wave of dizziness washes over him. He's thankful he's already on the floor just in case he does end up passing out.

It takes a couple of minutes before Tony appears, fresh out of bed with his hair sticking out every which way. "What? What's wrong? I'm here."

Tony rushes over to Steve, leaning over him to flush the toilet and then helping him to his feet. Steve stumbles and he holds onto Tony.

"Tony…" Steve's eyes flutter, the grip he has on Tony's night shirt loosening.

"Stay with me, honey. Don't pass out."

"Don't feel good."

"I know, I know. I'm taking you to a doctor, okay?"

Tony carefully leads Steve out of the bathroom and back to the bedroom where he lowers him down onto the bed.

"No, no. No doctors," Steve mumbles.

"Damn it, Steve! I can't take seeing you like this! Something needs to be done," Tony says. He runs a hand through his hair, making it even messier. He sighs. "Please? Honey, I can't. I think we need to…"

Steve looks up at him, his heart shattering at the thought. But he knows he's right. They said they'd wait for improvement and there hasn't been any.

“I don’t want to.”

“I don’t either. But, Steve…honey, you’re not getting better. Every day you’re getting weaker and weaker. Nothing is working.”

“I just need more time. I…” Steve trails off, letting out a groan when his head throbs and the room continues to spin. He hunches forward and cradles his head in his hands.

“How much? Because I can’t take seeing you like this every day. Maybe your body just can’t do this. I’m sorry,” Tony says.

Steve slowly lifts his head and connects his eyes with Tony’s. “It’s okay. Maybe you’re right. I don’t know if I can do this anymore.”

“You don’t have to.”

Steve takes a deep breath, only for it to come out shaky, his emotions coming through despite his attempt to conceal them. His eyes fill with tears but he won’t allow them to fall. He has to be strong.

# Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Steve wakes up the following morning, it's to an empty bed and the smell of fresh coffee. He stares at the cold spot beside him for a moment, wishing Tony would come back to bed for a few more hours. But he knows that's unlikely when they had an appointment to get to.

Steve rolls over onto his back and lets out a deep sigh. One hand falls to his belly, something he's caught himself doing more of. Ever since he found out he was expecting, he constantly touches his stomach, imagining the new life growing inside of him. He expected to see his belly grow as the baby got bigger and healthier. Now he was never going to see that happen.

He doesn't register the tears at first, but when he does, he wipes them away quickly, not wanting to work himself up and somehow make things worse.

As much as he'd rather stay in bed all day and rest, he knew Tony would come looking for him, so he forces himself out of bed. His stomach is queasy, and he's not sure if it's upset because of the constant nausea or his nerves. Maybe a bit of both.

Tony is downstairs in the kitchen, leaning against the counter as he sips his morning cup of coffee. He looks tired and drained, both mentally and emotionally. Steve knew he didn't sleep well based on how many times Tony tossed and turned all night. The difficult decision they made was clearly affecting him too.

"Hey," Tony says when he notices Steve walking into the kitchen. "How'd you sleep?"

Steve shrugs and moves toward the coffee pot to pour himself a cup. "Fine, I guess."

"We have to leave in thirty minutes. Do you want me to make breakfast or stop somewhere?"

"Not hungry."

Tony sighs loudly. "Honey, you need to eat. It's good for you and the—" Tony immediately stops himself when he realizes what he's almost said. Steve's eyes fill with tears again.

"There's no point anymore," Steve says, turning away to grab the coffee creamer from the fridge. He opens the door and stares too long inside, trying to gather himself before Tony notices.

But Tony knows him too well. Being around each other for so long means Tony's learned a lot about him. He knows what makes Steve tick; he knows his quirks; his hopes and dreams. Tony's learned it all, and he especially knows when Steve is hurting.

"We don't have to do this if you don't want to," Tony says.

Steve looks over at him, finally revealing the red around his eyes and the tears that won't stop flowing. Tony comes closer, pulling Steve in and holding him tight, offering a comfort Steve didn't know he needed.

"If you really want this baby then…I don't know. Maybe we can figure it out. I just hate seeing you so sick," Tony says.

Steve clings to him, his eyes squeezing shut as he tries and fails to stop more tears from falling. "I want this baby. I really do."

Tony pulls away slightly, just enough to look into Steve's eyes. "But? I sense some hesitation."

Steve releases a shaky breath. "I'm afraid I'm going to lose it. My body isn't…it's not…it's not doing what it needs to do for this baby."

"We don't know that for sure. The pregnancy could just be kicking your ass. I can find you some doctors if I have to."

"Like who? No one has ever dealt with a pregnant super soldier."

"There's a first for everything. Maybe you'll make it in the Guinness World Records or something."

Steve huffs out a laugh, the sound causing Tony to smile.

"Come here." Tony urges Steve back into his arms and Steve goes willingly. "If you want to think more about it then that's fine. I'll support whatever decision you want to do. I'm down for the ride, sweetheart. No matter how rocky it is."

---

They end up going to see a doctor, hoping for something good. They both agreed that if they couldn't get help then Steve would terminate. It wasn't something he truly wanted, but it wasn't worth his own health.

The baby is surprisingly doing well and on the right track. Steve's given some medication for the nausea and a few suggestions that might help. Steve's already done a few from the list and knows how unhelpful they are, but he forces a smile anyway and promises to give them a try.

They're free to go and they leave with Steve's prescription, a picture of their baby, and hope things will get better.

The ride back to the compound is silent. Steve holds the sonogram picture in one hand while the other grips the brown paper bag from the pharmacy. He rests his head back and closes his eyes, trying to focus on anything but the nausea that's hitting him hard.

"You good?" Tony asks, stealing a glance from the road to look over at Steve. "Honey?"

“I heard you,” Steve says, squeezing his eyes shut even tighter when his stomach churns. “I don’t feel good.”

“The medication should help.”

Steve manages a nod. “I hope so. Can you drive slower?”

“Any slower and we’re gonna have some angry people.”

Steve groans and turns away, pressing the button on the door to roll the window down to let it some fresh air.

“Do you need me to pull over or do you think you’ll make it home?” Tony asks, removing one hand from off the wheel so he can rub Steve’s shoulder instead. “Breathe, honey.”

“I’ll make it,” Steve assures and he opens his eyes and faces Tony, offering him a small smile. “I can do this.”

“All day?”

Steve shakes his head and throws it back gently against the seat. “No.”

---

Natasha’s face lights up and she makes a noise that suspiciously sounds like a squeal of excitement when Steve shows her the sonogram. He doesn’t call her out on it, but a smile spreads across his face at the thought of a dangerous assassin being excited over his pregnancy.

“Look at their little face!” Her smile brightens as she studies the grainy black and white picture. “I can’t believe you’re pregnant!”

Steve smiles back, though it’s not as vibrant as hers. He’s over the moon with excitement and he wishes he could do a better job at showing it. It’s been difficult to act like himself or be excited over his own pregnancy when every day he’s struggling with it.

He hopes it won’t come down to him having to terminate, especially since it’s obvious he’s not the only one excited about the baby. He doesn’t want to think about what he might have to do if he doesn’t improve, but lately that’s all he’s had on his mind.

“Steve?” Natasha’s worried voice captures his attention and he looks up at her, instantly feeling guilty for causing her concern.

“Sorry. Just tired,” he replies, rubbing at his forehead. It’s not a complete lie. Lack of sleep has been another issue he’s been constantly dealing with. But he knows she senses more and when she grabs his hand, he struggles to hold his composure. “Nat,” he whispers, his eyes filling with tears.

“What’s going on? You can talk to me about anything, you know that.”

“I know.” Steve nods and he takes a deep breath to gather himself. “I…I haven’t been doing well. Not really.”

“I had a feeling. You try to hide it but I think we can all see it. Tony seems more clingy than usual,” Natasha says.

“He’s worried. Honestly, I don’t blame him. This pregnancy has been hard. I don’t know what’s going on but my body is just…it’s not doing what it needs to do. Tony and I talked about terminating…”

“Oh.” Natasha frowns but Steve can see the pain in her eyes. “Is that why you didn’t want to say anything to us?”

“No. I wanted to wait until I was further along and sure everything was fine. But it’s not, Nat. I saw a doctor this morning and put on medication for the nausea. But if it doesn’t work and I don’t get better—”

“You’ll terminate? Wow. I’m so sorry.” She lets go of his hand and wraps him in her arms instead. “We’re all here for you. I can’t imagine what you’re going through but you don’t have to do it alone.”

“Thank you.” Steve squeezes his eyes shut to prevent any tears from falling. “Don’t tell the others. I want to wait and see what happens.”

Natasha nods and they break apart. She takes his hand again. “What else did the doctor say? Is there anything you can do besides medication?”

“Not really. The baby’s fine, believe it or not. It’s me that’s the issue. I’m worried I won’t be able to carry the baby to term.”

“I think you need to find another doctor.”

Steve scoffs. “Like who? No one has dealt with a pregnant super soldier before.”

“No but we do know a guy who might be able to help. I’d give Strange a call,” Natasha says.

“You really think he can help me?”

“It’s worth a shot. I know how bad you want this to work out.”

Steve smiles. “I do.”

Chapter End Notes

I wonder if Strange will be able to help them despite not being the right doctor or even a doctor anymore for that matter but let’s see! I also might have Bruce try to help him out.

Stony wants their kid! It’s just super hard for Steve right now 😔

# Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> I'm so excited for this story, y'all! I was brainstorming and I thought of some stuff and I can't wait to share it!
>
> Here is some more Steve whump. It's not bad yet but he doesn't feel good.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve knows exactly where his husband's run off to; the lab was his favorite place to be, mostly because it meant he got to use his tech and tools to distract himself from what's going on around him. A part of Steve hates interrupting when Tony clearly needs a moment to himself, but with the gnawing worry and uncertainty regarding their unborn child, he pushes aside his guilt and steps into the lab.

Music is blaring and the unmistakable sounds of Tony's tools going off fill the space. Steve follows the sounds, a look of confusion crossing his features when he discovers that Tony isn't at his workstation. He looks over toward his left, finding his husband in the small kitchen and pouring himself a cup of coffee.

"Tony," Steve calls out to get his attention and Tony finally notices him, a small smile forming over his lips. It's gone just as quickly as it appeared, replaced with an expression Steve struggles to fully read. "Can we talk?"

"Yeah," Tony replies, then he takes a sip from his cup.

He gestures toward the sofa he uses for those long nights in the lab and they take a seat. Tony continues to drink his coffee and Steve fiddles with his fingers.

"I was talking to Nat," Steve begins, his eyes locking with Tony's. "I told her how bad things have been and—"

"It's gonna get better," Tony interrupts. "It has to. The doctor said the medication should help. You've been taking it, right?"

"Yes, I don't skip it. But, Tony…if this doesn't work out and we have to terminate the pregnancy…" Steve trails off with a sigh. His eyes fill with tears. "Do you think we can do it?"

"No," Tony answers without hesitation. "God, no. But I don't want you to suffer because of the pregnancy. I'm sorry but it's not worth—dammit." Tony rises to his feet and heads back into the kitchen, throwing his mug into the sink, the sound of it breaking filling the space around them.

Steve stays where he is, trying to keep himself calm before he tries to calm down his husband. After a few seconds pass and Tony still hasn't returned to his side, Steve follows him, coming up behind Tony and wrapping his arms around his waist.

"It's okay," Steve whispers. It's not. He might not get better and they might have to terminate the pregnancy. That thought alone kills him inside and he wishes they didn't even have to consider that as an option.

Tony heaves out a sigh. "I appreciate your giddy optimism, sweetheart."

"It's all I have going for me right now," Steve admits.

Tony turns around and pulls Steve into his arms, holding him close. They both needed this. "I'll find you a good team of doctors. I want you and the baby to be okay."

"I know. Nat said to call Strange. Maybe he could help us."

Tony doesn't say anything at first. Steve was well aware of their rocky relationship. They butted heads whenever they teamed up with the wizard. Steve hopes this time they might be able to come together and figure out a solution. He didn't know what else to do.

"I guess. He irritates me, though." Tony huffs. Steve smiles and hugs Tony a little tighter. "But I'll do it for you and the baby."

Steve pulls away and cups Tony's face. "And that's why I love you," he says before connecting their lips.

"Really?" Tony murmurs against Steve's lips and they break apart. "And here I was thinking it was because of my charm and good looks."

Steve chuckles. "That too."

A soft smile spreads across Tony's face. "Hey." He gently hooks a finger under Steve's chin. "It's gonna be okay. Maybe it doesn't seem like it now but I promise I'm gonna do everything I can for you and the baby."

"I know you will." Steve smiles. "Now call Strange."

Tony tips his head back with a dramatic groan. "Fine! Happy?"

"Very."

---

Steve shivers and pulls the blanket up to his chin, desperately trying to get warm despite the heater going. Tony made sure to turn the heat up when Steve complained earlier. Steve thinks he's just freezing because the weather dropped outside and the streets of New York were blanketed with snow. He usually runs pretty hot and he read in one of the parenting books that the body's temperature rises during pregnancy, so by all accounts he should be warm and cozy, maybe even too hot for the blanket and sweater, but his body continues to be wracked with the shivers.

Steve dozes on and off for most of the morning. He stirs from his nap when he hears the front door open. Tony steps inside their home, shedding his winter coat and folding it over his arm. Steve lifts his head slightly, shooting him a tired smile.

“How was the meeting?” he asks, his voice still thick with sleep.

“Boring. Got a new investor though.” Tony comes over and leans down to kiss Steve. “How was the couch?”

Steve chuckles softly. “Great. Been sleeping all day.” He shivers and pulls the blanket up even higher. “Can you turn up the heat?”

Tony frowns. “Baby, it’s eighty degrees in here. You want it higher?”

“I’m cold.”

Tony reaches out and places his hand over Steve’s forehead. His skin is hot to the touch. “Jesus. You’re burning up. How else do you feel?”

“Just cold and a little achy. Why?” Steve’s brows furrow. “You think I’m getting sick?”

“Something. I wonder if it’s another pregnancy thing.”

“Have you heard from Strange?”

Tony sighs. “No. I think it was a mistake to contact him. Maybe we can find another doctor —”

“We will but I want to see if he can do anything.”

“And if he doesn’t? Steve, I think this is a waste of time. The man doesn’t even have the decency to return my calls or—”

Just then a gold circle begins to manifest in the middle of the living room. The portal fully forms and a familiar figure steps through. Strange closes the portal behind him with a simple gesture of his hand.

“Speak of the devil. Or wizard,” Tony says.

“Stark,” Strange greets, his voice tight. “I got your call.”

“Yeah, Buddy, that was three days ago!”

“I’ve been busy.”

Tony scoffs. “So have we. Where have you been? Another kid’s birthday party?”

Stephen narrows his eyes. “Protecting the universe, douchebag.”

Steve decides to quickly get involved before a fight breaks out. It’s happened before between his husband and the sorcerer, and Steve would really love if it didn’t happen again, especially

when they need his help.

“Thank you for coming,” Steve says and he makes an attempt to get up, only to go back down when a wave of dizziness washes over him. Tony is at his side in seconds, carefully lowering him back down. “I’m fine. It’s nothing.”

“It’s not fine,” Tony says sternly. “See?” Tony turns toward Stephen and gestures to Steve. “This is why I needed your ass here days ago.”

“What happened?” Stephen comes over to get a look for himself. Steve hates being crowded around, but something tells him he better get used to it.

“I’m pregnant and I haven’t been feeling well,” Steve explains.

“How far along are you?”

“Thirteen weeks.”

Stephen nods, processing the information. “You’re far enough that there’s little chance of a miscarriage…however…it’s still early enough to terminate.”

“We know,” Steve says, wrapping one arm around himself protectively as if the sorcerer was about to follow through with the idea to terminate.

“And we’re not doing it,” Tony adds.

“I’m assuming the serum is interfering?” Stephen asks and Steve nods. “You know this could endanger both you and the baby?”

“That’s why we need your help. I want this baby. I’ll do whatever it takes to make sure they’re okay,” Steve says, determined.

Stephen looks at Steve for a moment, nodding. He runs a hand through his hair, thinking through the different possibilities in his mind. “I don’t know if I can help you, Captain. I’m not the right doctor you need. I suggest seeking help from someone who specializes in pregnancy.”

“I’ve seen a doctor and all they’ve done is give me meds for the nausea. I need your help.”

“I can’t help you.”

“Why? What are you not telling me?” Steve frowns.

“I’m sorry,” Stephen says, then he opens up another portal and steps through it.

---

Steve awakens with a start, his stomach churning and threatening to expel the bit of food he ate during dinner. He staggers out of bed, moving as quickly as can through the dark toward the bathroom, barely making it before he vomits. He hunches over the toilet, his hands flying

out to grip the back of it to hold himself up. He throws up everything he's consumed, but the nausea persists and he vomits again, his throat burning when nothing but bile comes up.

A gentle touch on his back startles him. "I'm here," Tony's soothing voice fills Steve's ears. "It's okay, it's okay." He rubs small circles over Steve's back.

Steve eventually composes himself and he pulls away, using the back of his hand to wipe his mouth. Tony intervenes and flushes the toilet while Steve walks over to the sink to try and rinse out the sour taste.

"I thought you took your meds," Tony says.

"I did," Steve grits out.

"I'm not trying to say you're skipping them. It just doesn't make sense why they're not working."

"I don't know."

They go back to the bedroom and Steve crawls back into bed, his body shivering from the chill that runs through him. He pulls the comforter tight around him but the cold still lingers.

"'M so cold."

"J, turn the heat up a bit. Eighty two should be fine."

JARVIS follows the command and the heater clicks on.

Tony gets into bed and pulls Steve close, wrapping his arm around him. "You're burning up again."

"It's just a fever," Steve says, his teeth chattering.

"You never get sick. Even when I got that cold eight months ago you never got it."

"The serum…I-I don't think it's w-working."

"I'll find you another doctor."

"W-who? Strange was s-supposed to he-help."

"Forget him. I'll find someone, okay? I promise?"

Steve nods and moves even closer to Tony, seeking out his warmth and comfort. It helps, but only just a little. He needed more.

Chapter End Notes

That’s not the end from Strange! He’s coming back! Also there’s gonna be more Steve whump as the pregnancy progresses. This isn’t gonna be easy for him at all!

Thank you for reading!

# Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> Y'all I'm having fun with this story! I have so many ideas for it and it's hard to not write this one. I promise I'll work on my other fics now!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The following week, Steve is fever free. His body still aches and he's still nauseous despite the medication. He keeps up with it anyway, swallowing the pills every time he needs them, only for the medication to fail and have him running toward the nearest toilet when the nausea kicks in.

The latest passage in his parenting book says that he should be gaining some of his energy back and able to eat since the morning sickness usually subsides at this point. But the book has it all wrong, or at least for him it does. Maybe others during this stage of their pregnancy are finally feeling like themselves again and able to enjoy this special moment of their life. Steve's not so lucky.

He's tired and his body hurts, half of the time he only wants to stay in bed and rot all day. It's difficult to go on his morning runs, but he wants to try and stay active. So he forces himself out of bed one early, cool morning to hit the track.

He takes a moment to examine himself in the mirror, ignoring the slightly pale complexion of his skin and the ugly bruise on his arm from when he accidentally bumped into the wall during a dizzy spell. He doesn't focus too much on his injuries when something else catches his eye.

Steve's officially in his second trimester now which means he should be starting to see his belly grow. He lifts his shirt out of the way to inspect for a bump, turning toward his side to see if a different angle would help. And it does. Just below his navel his belly distends slightly, a small curve just noticeable if you really focused on it. He smiles and slides his hand along the bump, taking it all in just in case he never gets another chance.

He hates thinking like this. Of course he's going to watch his belly grow. He's going to fight whatever is wrong and in the end it will all be worth it. He'll have a beautiful baby to love and hold.

"I can't wait to meet you," he says softly to the bump. The book says he still has weeks to go until his baby's ears have fully formed and can hear his voice. They'll be able to hear his heartbeat too. He hopes it'll be able to comfort them. They both were going to need extra care it seems.

By the time Steve makes it outside the sun is just beginning to rise. It's chilly and he zips up his hoodie the rest of the way, hoping it's enough to shield him from the cold. He's not too worried, though; he'll be warming up the moment he gets his body moving.

He starts off slow and easy, not wanting to push himself too quickly and risk harming himself. He does one lap; so far so good, and he thinks for a moment he might be able to get a decent workout.

Turns out, he overdoes it somehow. He's made it to his third lap when his body begins to protest. His legs burn as if they're on fire and his lungs work hard to get enough air into them. The cold doesn't help, only making his aching body hurt more. Steve slows down to a jog, trying to breathe and compose himself. It doesn't work and black spots dance around his vision. He staggers for a moment, nearly running off the track and into a tree.

Finally, he stops, bending over and resting his hands over his knees as he tries to breathe. His chest burns and his head spins. He stumbles backwards, his feet almost giving out before he notices and he quickly catches himself.

He feels worse now and his stomach churns. He has no choice but to cut his run short and return back inside.

He doesn't go back up to the apartment just yet, and instead he makes his way into the common room. The smell of fresh coffee fills his nostrils. It makes him want to vomit.

Natasha is in the kitchen, humming softly to herself as she prepares herself a cup of coffee. She notices Steve come in and she smiles, only for it to falter when she notices his heavy breathing and uneasy steps.

"Jesus. What the hell happened to you?" She abandons her morning coffee and assists him instead, leading him over to the sofas. "I'll get you some water."

"Please." Steve groans and hunches forward, cradling his throbbing head. "I don't feel good."

Natasha returns with a glass of cold water. "This should help." She sits down beside him. "What happened?"

"I went out for a run," Steve says, then he gulps down the water, drinking too fast and choking on it.

"Slow down."

Steve nods and coughs. He takes a small sip this time. "I thought I was okay to do it."

"What gave you that idea?" Natasha asks.

"The books…they said I should be feeling better…but I'm not."

"You're also not like the people the book was written for. Maybe a book on pregnant super soldiers needs to be published."

“Maybe. I don’t know what’s wrong with me, Nat. Strange said the serum was interfering but…I don’t know. I think there’s more he’s not telling me.”

“You could always go see him. Make him tell you what the hell is going on. Have you seen another doctor?”

Steve shakes his head and takes another small sip of water. “Not yet. I have an appointment tomorrow with another OB. I don’t know if she’ll be able to help me.”

Natasha sighs sadly. “I’m sorry. I hate that this is happening to you.”

Steve looks over at her and smiles. “It’s okay. I’m gonna fight this. Whatever it is…I can handle it.”

Natasha doesn’t look so sure, but she nods anyway. “Yeah, I know you will.”

“Strange says I might have to terminate. He said it’s still early enough for me to do it but…I don’t think I can. The baby’s growing. Look.” He leans back and lifts up his shirt to expose the bump he just recently discovered.

Natasha gasps and she reaches out to touch, only to grow hesitate and pull away. Steve grabs her hand and leads it to his belly. She smiles softly. “You’re definitely pregnant, Rogers. Your abs are officially gone.”

Steve chuckles. “It’s crazy, huh? I never thought I could have something like this. Tony and I talked about it loads of times but…I don’t know. We didn’t think it would happen for us, and then it did and now all I want to do is take care of this baby. I don’t care what I have to do.”

“Did Strange say anything else?”

“No. I don’t know if he knows something or he doesn’t want to get involved. I’ll see another doctor tomorrow and get this straightened out. Pretty soon there will be a little one in the compound.”

Natasha smiles as she pictures it. “I can’t wait.”

Steve smiles back. “Me, too.”

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The drive home from the doctor’s office is silent. Steve keeps his eyes out the passenger window while Tony stares straight ahead at the road, his hands gripping the wheel so tight his knuckles have turned just as white as the snow outside. The radio plays softly in the background and Steve is half tempted to shut it off when another commercial break comes on.

He reaches for the lever on the side of the seat and reclines back, his eyes falling shut. He’s tired and physically drained. Getting only a few hours of sleep a night does that to a person. His insomnia used to be brought on by nightmares from the war and his past life. Then he met Tony and things started to improve. He slept well when he had another person lying next to him. Now that wasn’t helping anymore.

They pass by a billboard offering safe and legal abortions. Steve frowns as he sees it, one hand finding its way to his slightly swollen belly. He pays attention to the phone number for the clinic, tucking it away just in case he might need to call them for an appointment.

He didn't have a lot of options.

The doctor couldn't help him. She offered more medication for the nausea and instructed him to rest and take it easy. His case was too complicated for her, and she even mentioned it being too much for others in her field. No one knew how to deal with a pregnant super soldier. His body was too complex.

His baby was fine. Right on track growth wise and there didn't appear to be any health issues. Steve was sure the doctor would've found something wrong considering the serum was responsible for his difficult pregnancy, but the baby was completely okay.

Steve hates to think it, but it's not fair. Why was he suffering? He knows a parent is supposed to make a lot of sacrifices for their child. He just didn't think his life would be one of them.

There was a risk he could die. At least, that's what the doctor said. He thinks about the option to terminate. She recommended it and said he was still early enough to do it. He had to make a choice soon, though. Pretty soon he would pass the stage where he could get an abortion.

"I think I need to do it," Steve says, finally breaking the silence. He still keeps his gaze out the window, not wanting to look at the pain on his husband's face when he tells them they need to abort. "I need an abortion."

Tony exhales and Steve sneaks a peek his way, noticing the hardened expression on his face. "Okay."

Steve frowns. He had expected more from him. Tony didn't want to abort. He also said he didn't want to lose Steve either. It was a difficult situation for them both.

"I can make an appointment," Steve says, pulling out his phone and putting in the number he memorized. "If you don't want to go with me, that's fine."

"I'll go with you." Tony releases one hand from the wheel and takes Steve's hand. "We're doing this together."

Steve nods and turns away to hide his tears.

Chapter End Notes

I feel so bad for them! 😭 Don't worry they'll get some help!

I'll update soon!

# Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Can y'all tell I love this story? 🫣 I'm updating it a lot! 😬

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony rushes into the bathroom the moment he hears Steve throwing up. They had been curled up on the sofa watching a movie before this happened; Steve was actually feeling comfortable and dozing off in Tony's arms, but now the nausea was back and hitting him hard.

Tony's at Steve's side in seconds, gently rubbing his back and trying to calm Steve down when he throws up so hard, he panics and nearly falls over. This round is grueling; far worse than the episode Steve had after breakfast. When Steve sways, Tony is there to catch him, carefully leading him over to the sink to help clean him up.

"Do you want to shower?" Tony asks, his eyes flickering down to the bit of vomit covering the front of Steve's shirt.

Steve slowly nods his head and winces. "I don't feel good."

"I know, honey. I'll help you shower then you can lie down."

It's a little difficult to get Steve into the shower. His body is weak and drained, relying heavily on Tony to help keep him upright. Tony finally gets Steve under the water, and he doesn't stop him when he leans against the shower wall.

"How are you feeling now?" Tony asks while he lathers up a loofah.

"Tired," Steve replies, his eyes falling shut. "I hate this."

"I know. I do too."

Tony works quickly to get Steve clean, not wanting his sick husband to stay too long in the shower when he should be in bed resting. Once Steve is clean, Tony helps Steve out and wraps a towel around him, then he leads him toward the bedroom.

Steve sits down on the bed, pulling the towel tighter around himself while Tony searches for some clean clothes. He finds a worn out *Star Wars* T-shirt and a pair of Steve's favorite sweatpants.

"Those don't fit," Steve says when he notices the pants. "Baby got a little bigger."

Tony frowns and he glances at the bump that's started to take over Steve's body. It doesn't look that much different from last week, but Steve knew his body better and if he claimed the baby grew, then Tony would have to take his word for it.

His eyes linger on the bump a little longer than he means to, a wave of guilt washing over him at the thought of it disappearing. Steve's appointment for the abortion was tomorrow morning, and it hasn't fully sunk in yet. This would be the last night Tony gets to be around his child.

"I can see if there's anything else," Tony says, turning away to rummage through Steve's dresser in search of clothes that fit. They probably should've made plans to go shopping for new clothes instead of aborting their baby, but life was cruel and unfair sometimes.

Tony returns with a pair of old basketball shorts Steve usually wears during the summer months. Steve makes a face, no doubt hating the idea of wearing shorts when it's snowing out, but it's the only thing that fits and he takes them.

Steve crawls under the blankets once he's dressed, pulling the comforter up to his chin, his body trembling despite the heat going and the layers on the bed. Tony joins him a few minutes later and he pulls Steve close to give him extra warmth.

"How are you feeling, sweetheart?" Tony asks while he runs his fingers through Steve's damp hair.

"Cold. My body hurts," Steve murmurs, his eyes already closed.

"Do you want Tylenol?"

Steve shakes his head and moves even closer to Tony, seeking out his warmth and comfort. "Don't get up. I like having you here."

"I'm not going anywhere." Tony promises and he kisses the top of Steve's head.

Steve whimpers and buries his face into the crook of Tony's neck, his body still shaking from both the cold and the pain. Tony continues to softly thread his fingers through Steve's hair. He wishes he could do more for him.

He doesn't understand why Steve is suffering like this. He knew nausea and vomiting were a normal part of the early stages of pregnancy, but this has been going on longer than it's supposed to. Steve was good about taking the meds; Tony's watched him pop them in his mouth like fucking candy, and yet they refuse to ease the nausea.

Steve needed a doctor, someone who could properly help him. Strange had been their best bet, but when he refused, they had no choice but to search for help elsewhere, only to be told Steve couldn't be helped. His case was too complex and a few doctors even mentioned being worried about his powers causing more problems. They treated him like some kind of freak or threat. Tony hated it.

He thinks about what they have to do tomorrow, and he can't help but wish they didn't have to. The pregnancy had been unexpected and the thought of becoming a father terrifies Tony to his very core, but he still wants the baby. He wants to be a father. He wants to be there for his child and love them unconditionally. But he is never going to get that chance. It wasn't fair.

When Steve finally dozes off, Tony carefully gets out of bed, unable to find any rest. He wanders into the kitchen for a glass of water. He leans against the counter as he sips it, his eyes noticing the black and white photo on the fridge. He walks over to it and carefully removes it, studying it closely, his eyes filling with tears.

Tony exhales loudly and leans back against the counter, his hand still clutching the photo. "I'm sorry, kiddo."

A few tears roll down his face and he wipes them away, but the hurt is still there, and he knows it's going to be for a long time.

He takes the photo downstairs with him to his lab and he has JARVIS boot up the computers. He tries to tinker for an hour, but he grows bored of that quickly. All he can think about is losing his child and all the pain Steve is feeling and will feel once they lose the baby.

"Fuck," Tony mutters and leans back in his seat, scrubbing a hand over his face. He yawns, his body demanding rest, but he wasn't ready to give in just yet. He needed to figure out a way to help Steve and their unborn child.

---

Steve's alarm goes off and he rolls over with a groan, reaching out for his phone so he can snooze it for a few more minutes. He notices the bed is empty and he frowns, wondering where Tony was. It wasn't like him to be up this early. He most likely stayed up all night.

With a sigh, Steve pulls himself out of bed, groaning softly when his body protests and pain shoots through him. He hasn't felt this fatigued and achy since he was young. He thought for sure once he took the serum that his old health issues would be a thing of the past. How wrong he was.

Steve grabs one of the extra blankets and wraps it around his shoulders, pulling it tight around him as he makes his way downstairs. He's extra careful now, not wanting to lose his balance and risk another injury or worse.

Tony's not in the living room or kitchen, but it's easy to figure out where once Steve realizes Tony isn't in their apartment. He tries to call and text, but none of his messages are replied to. With a huff, he makes his way down to the lab.

He's not surprised to find Tony downstairs, but what does surprise him is the fact that Bruce is with him. They're chatting about something. Steve's curiosity gets the best of him and he enters the passcode for the lab, the glass doors opening up for him.

"How do we know this will work?" Bruce asks Tony. "I'm not that kind of doctor."

“I know,” Tony replies. “But no one else is willing to help. You should see the way they treat him. Please, Bruce? I’m begging you.”

Steve has never heard his husband sound so desperate. He knows right away what their conversation is about and he ducks out of sight, his ears perked as he listens for more.

Bruce sighs heavily and fiddles with his glasses. “He needs someone who specializes in this sort of thing. Didn't Strange say that?”

“Yes, but those people don’t want to touch him! Please? I need your help here. I’m gonna lose my child in less than two hours unless I can find a way to save them.”

“Tony, if Steve made the choice to abort then you have to accept that.”

“I know, but I don’t want to give up either. I hate seeing Steve sick and I’m tired of the only option to help him is to end the pregnancy. There has to be something we can do. Come on, we’re the Science Bros; we should be able to figure this out.”

“And if we can’t? What then?”

“Then fine. I’ll give in. I’ll accept defeat. But I’m not there yet. If we lose this kid, I’m gonna lose Steve. He won’t be the same.”

Bruce nods as he absorbs Tony’s words. “I’ll get in contact with Helen. Maybe she can help us.”

Tony smiles and pats Bruce on the shoulder. “I knew I could count on you.”

Steve sneaks out of the lab, moving as quickly and quietly as he can, entering the elevator and pressing the buttons to close the doors. He doesn’t know where to go so he backs himself into a corner, tears forming in his eyes.

He so badly wants to approach Tony and Bruce, but he’s scared. He’s scared they won’t be able to help him or the baby. No one else wants to help, and because of that he’s lost faith. It reminds him of all the times when he was young and doctors treated him like a lost cause, wondering why his mother was still fighting for something that couldn't be helped.

He wonders if his mother felt like this: defeated and full of hopelessness. He places a hand over his belly and more tears roll down his face.

“I’m sorry.”

Chapter End Notes

I wonder if Bruce will be able to help them somehow 🤔 I got something up my sleeve 😉

Thanks for reading! ❤️

# Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There's no easy way to bring up the conversation Steve overheard between Tony and Bruce. He decides to keep it to himself on the journey to the clinic, not wanting to accidentally start a fight and make the already terrible day worse.

He keeps himself occupied with his phone, sending messages to Natasha to keep her informed. She tries to cheer him up with funny replies or pictures, but she still offers comfort and sympathy and promises hugs when he returns.

Steve appreciates the gesture, but deep down he knows a few hugs and condolences weren't going to be enough. He's been around pain and suffering his whole life, and even though he had people to help him get through it, he still struggled and wished he never had to deal with it in the first place.

Losing a child could never compare to all of the pain he's endured. He never thought something like this would happen to him. The idea of having children wasn't a reality for him back before the serum, but then he was granted a new life and a second chance to live, and that idea of a family finally became a reality. And just like that, it's gone. Ripped away from him before he could even get a chance.

They pull up to the clinic and Tony parks the car. Steve looks up, his heart dropping when he realizes what he has to do. He touches his belly, wishing there was something he could do to keep his unborn child safe. But there was nothing. He was losing hope every single day and he couldn't live like that anymore.

"You ready?" Steve asks when he notices that Tony is still buckled in and the car is still on.

Tony says nothing, just continues to stare straight ahead, his fingers gripping the steering wheel tightly.

"No. I can't…I can't do this."

Steve frowns. "You said you'd do this with me."

This time Tony looks at him and Steve can see the pain swimming in his eyes. "I'm sorry. I can't. What if there was a way to save the baby? Would you do it?"

"Of course. But, Tony, there is nothing else we can do. You've heard what the doctors said. Even Strange agrees."

"But maybe we're not doing enough."

"What did you and Bruce talk about?"

“What?”

“Don’t play dumb. I heard you talking to him this morning.”

Tony heaves out a sigh and he turns away, his fingers gripping the wheel tightly. “I asked him to help us,” he says, glancing over at Steve again. “If there’s a way we can figure out why the serum is—”

“Oh my God,” Steve groans and attempts to get out of the car.

“Stop!” Tony’s hand flies out to grab Steve’s shoulder, stopping him from leaving. “Honey, just listen for a second. If he and I can figure this out we don’t have to get rid of the baby. You won’t be sick anymore. Isn’t that worth a try?”

“And what if it doesn’t work? If we wait any longer I won’t be able to terminate and I will not wait around for our baby to die!”

“So killing them today is the better option!”

“I’m just…” Steve turns away, his eyes filling with tears. “I don’t have another choice.”

“If you just give Bruce a chance—”

Steve shakes his head and opens the car door. “I can’t take that risk. If you don't want to do this with me then fine. Maybe next time don’t act like you’re on board with me when you’re really not.”

Tony pounds his fist into the steering wheel and Steve slams the door shut. He heads inside the clinic, half expecting Tony to get out of the car and follow him, but he never does, and Steve knows he’ll have to do this alone.

There’s not many people in the waiting room, but Steve adjusts the beanie on his head anyway, not wanting to draw too much attention to himself. His baby bump is hidden underneath the layers he has on, but he still wonders if anyone notices and silently judges him. That’s ridiculous to think considering the other patients are in the same boat as him.

He’s thinking too much. His brain is too noisy and he struggles to get it to quiet down. But all he can think about is Tony and if maybe he should give him and Bruce a shot. It’s a big risk to take and there was no going back if their attempts failed. Steve’s taken risks before; participating in a science experiment for the government was his biggest one, and it turned out okay. There was a chance it could have failed and he would be stuck as the skinny guy forever, or worse, he could have died, but by some miracle he managed to overcome the risks and become the hero everyone needed.

Steve’s eventually called to the back and he waits nervously on the exam bed. He fiddles with his fingers and glances at the door every few minutes, wishing Tony would come through it and comfort him like he promised he would. They were supposed to be doing this together. From the moment they found out they were expecting, Tony said he would be there every step of the way. He didn’t care how rocky and challenging it was, he’d be there.

Tony still was in this. He was fighting to find a reason to keep their unborn child alive. He hadn't given up on Steve or their baby and was doing his best to figure out a solution to their problems. It was Steve who was giving up.

He places his hand over his belly, his eyes welling up with tears. His mother never gave up on him; she fought hard to keep him alive and well even after everyone told her to just give up. Steve had to do the same for his child. No matter how hard or risky it was, he couldn't give up.

The door creaks open and Steve looks up, finding Tony lingering in the doorway, a look of desperation written on his face.

"Tony," Steve sobs. Tony rushes over to him, wrapping his arms around his trembling frame and holding him tight.

"It's okay," Tony soothes. "I'm here. I won't let you do this alone. I promise."

"I can't. I can't." Steve clings to Tony harder, seeking only the comfort he can give. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"Shh. Sweetheart, it's okay. You don't have to apologize. I should be the one apologizing. If you want to do this then…then I'm on board."

Steve shakes his head and pulls away. "I can't give up."

"Honey…" Tony gently cups Steve's face and brushes away his tears.

"If you think we have a chance of having this baby then…then I want to try. I want to have this baby with you."

Tony smiles softly. "I do too. I don't know how but I'll figure this out. I'm not giving up on you and Tony Junior."

Steve chuckles. "We're not naming the baby Tony Junior."

"You say that now…"

Steve gets up from the bed and takes Tony's hand, their fingers interlocking and hopeful smiles on their faces as they head home.

---

Steve takes a deep breath and slowly exhales, doing everything he can to keep himself calm. He tries to stifle a yawn, but he fails miserably and he quickly tries to hide it behind his hand. He's exhausted and wishes he could've stayed in bed a little longer, especially since he had a restless night. If he wasn't throwing up, then he was tossing and turning as he thought about his child and the huge risk he'd be taking to keep his pregnancy progressing.

A few feet away Tony stands with Bruce, both sipping their morning cups of coffee while they wait for Helen to arrive. Steve entertains himself by looking around the high-tech lab. He's used to being in Tony's lab and all his gadgets and gizmos, but this was different. The

exam bed is a little uncomfortable and the room feels too cramped. Perhaps he's just nervous and finding ways to make himself back out of this. But that wasn't an option. He had to fight.

Helen arrives a few minutes later and they get started. Steve tries not to panic when he sees Bruce bring over a steel tray with a needle and a few vials to collect blood.

"Are you okay?" Bruce asks, sensing Steve's unease.

"I've never liked needles. You'd think I'd be used to them after all the times I've had my blood drawn but…" Steve's face pales when Bruce prepares the needle.

"Just relax. I'll be quick."

Steve turns away the moment Bruce sticks him. He winces and reaches for Tony's hand, finding it and giving it a squeeze. Tony leans in close and presses his lips to Steve's temple.

"Almost there, honey. You're doing great," Tony murmurs.

"All done," Bruce announces and he hands Helen the collected sample, then he works on bandaging Steve's arm. "Do you feel okay?"

"Not really," Steve replies. "But it's not because of this. I always feel sick."

"We're going to figure out why that is," Helen says, a reassuring smile on her face.

"Strange said the serum could be interfering with the pregnancy. Do you think that's what it is?" Steve asks.

"Could be. I'll analyze your blood sample and we'll run a few more tests," Helen replies.

Steve heaves out a sigh. "Great. I love tests."

"You got this. You've battled aliens and gods and all other sorts of weird shit. This is nothing for you." Tony smiles, taking Steve's hand and bringing it up to his lips to kiss it.

Steve forces a smile and tries to ignore the knot forming in the pit of his stomach. "I guess so."

Chapter End Notes

I got around to writing this one! This fic is fun and I love it but I want to try working on some of other fics. There's a few I really want to finish and update.

Thank you for reading!

# Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve clings to Tony, afraid if he were to loosen his grip for even a second he'd lose his balance and hit the floor. The last thing he needs is more pain and bruises. It's bad enough his whole body hurts and his arm is bruised from the needle.

"Almost there," Tony assures, leading Steve out of the elevator and toward their home. "How are you feeling? Still nauseous?"

"No," Steve replies, relieved that his stomach has stopped churning. "But I feel like I'm going to pass out."

"Please don't do that. I don't think I can catch you. At least let me get the suit."

Steve chuckles softly. "I'll give you a warning."

Tony says nothing and they eventually enter the apartment. Steve refuses the couch at first, only to decide that he'd rather sleep there than have Tony try to take him up the stairs.

"Better?" Tony asks once Steve is lying on the couch.

"Not really. My arm hurts." Steve winces and glances at his left arm. "Bruce poked me good."

Tony lifts Steve's arm to examine the puncture wound. "You never bruise this bad. I can get you an ice pack for the soreness."

"It should be healed by tomorrow," Steve says, pulling his arm away and placing it over his belly. His eyes fall shut. "I just need to rest. Today was a lot."

"Hopefully we will find out good news soon." Tony lifts Steve's legs out of the way and sits down, placing Steve's legs on his lap and squeezing his calves.

Steve hums in acknowledgment and shuts his eyes. "You can squeeze harder. I hope so. I just want to make sure everything is okay."

"I'm sure it is." Tony continues to rub Steve's legs, then he removes his socks and shoes so he can work on his feet. Steve moans softly and Tony chuckles. "I found the good spot, huh?"

"My feet just hurt. Everything hurts these days."

Tony frowns. "That's not normal. I know you've been sore and bruised before but not like this, and you haven't even been out in the field."

“I’ve also never been pregnant. Maybe it is just the serum acting differently. Strange said that and even Bruce seemed to agree.”

“Maybe. I just hope it gets easier from here. I hate seeing you so miserable.”

Steve opens his eyes and glances over at Tony, finding him staring straight ahead, but it’s obvious he’s overworking that big brain of his and the last thing Steve wants is for Tony to get so worked up over him.

“Hey.” Steve gently adjusts his leg to snap Tony out of his deep thoughts. Tony blinks and looks over at him, their eyes meeting. Steve shoots him a soft smile. “I’m okay. I trust you, Bruce and Helen to figure this out. It’s going to get better.”

A small smile forms over Tony’s face. “Yeah,” he says and he rests his head back against the sofa. “I know you will. You never back down from a fight.”

“I can do this all day.” Steve chuckles and he relaxes again. “Keep going. My feet are killing me.”

At some point Steve dozes off, his body finally relaxed enough for him to get some sleep. Tony continues to rub the aches out of Steve’s feet and legs, his eyes glued to Steve’s face, watching the way the muscles relax and a peaceful look appears over his features.

“You better be able to do this all day,” Tony whispers, his chest tightening up. He swallows hard. “I need you to.”

---

To distract himself from the test results, Steve makes himself comfortable in the common room and takes out his sketchbook. He doesn’t have an idea in mind and spends a few minutes just doodling along the page, finding himself starting to relax a bit and his worried mind finally calming down.

The churning in his gut isn’t as persistent, giving him a much needed break from the nausea. There’s a bit of nerves still lingering, but he forces himself to focus on something other than the results Bruce and Helen plan to go over.

“You’re gonna be okay,” he says, laying a hand over his belly. It’s grown a bit more and he’s starting to look pregnant. The book says the baby is the size of an apple, and with that in mind, Steve finds himself drawing an apple.

“There you are.”

Steve looks up, finding Bucky and Natasha entering the room. Steve shoots them a smile, then returns to his sketch. “Haven’t seen you two in a while,” he says. “Where’s Sam?”

“In the gym. Didn’t feel like working out,” Bucky replies and he plops down in the armchair closest to Steve. “What are you working on?”

Steve shrugs, his fingers still moving the pencil along as he shades in the apple. “My baby.”

Natasha peers over his shoulder and frowns. “Steve, that’s a fruit.”

“According to the baby book…the baby is about the size of an apple.”

“Just wait until it’s the size of a watermelon.” Bucky winces.

“Luckily that’s not for a while. I might be close though by the time the wedding rolls around,” Steve says.

“Speaking of wedding—” Natasha moves Steve’s legs out of the way and she sits down next to him. He throws his legs over her lap. “—we need to start planning. It’s coming up, James.”

“What else is there to do?” Bucky frowns in confusion.

“Do you have a tux?” Steve asks, craning his neck to look over at his friend.

“Yeah. Sort of. Do you?” Bucky shoots back.

“I’m gonna need to get one and probably have it altered. I’ll be twenty eight weeks by then.”

“Okay so that’s still enough time! I can wait too.”

Natasha raises a brow. “You’re not freaking out, are you?”

“What? No. No, I’m fine. I’m perfectly…fine.”

Steve shakes his head and returns to his sketch, adding a stem and a leaf to the apple. “It’s okay to be nervous, Buck. You’re getting married.”

“Yeah. Did you feel like this for your wedding?” Bucky asks, still frowning.

“Yep.” Steve nods. “But now look at us. We’re having a baby.”

Natasha’s face lights up and she gasps. “I’m calling it now! They’ll have a baby by next year.”

“Isn’t that a little soon?” Bucky asks. “It took Steve like three years.”

“We weren’t even trying,” Steve adds.

“Please don’t jinx me like that,” Bucky groans and rubs at his head. “Let me get married first, okay? One step at a time.”

“Unless you’re already pregnant!” Natasha says.

Steve looks over at Bucky. “Are you?”

“No!” Bucky exclaims.

“Can you imagine if our kids were close in age? I bet they’d end up like us.” Steve smiles.

A smile forms over Bucky's face. "They'll still be close. Your kid might be older though. Like ten years or so."

Natasha rolls her eyes. "You're not waiting that long, James. Next year you'll be the knocked up one."

"And this little one will be excited to have a cousin." Steve places a hand over his belly.

Bucky's eyes follow Steve's movement and his brows crease with concern. "Yeah…"

"When do you get the results?" Natasha asks, changing the subject.

"Soon. JARVIS is supposed to let me know when—"

"Captain Rogers," JARVIS interrupts. "Sir is looking for you. He's in the lab with Dr. Banner and Dr. Cho."

"Speak of the devil," Steve says and he closes up his sketchbook. "Guess I'm finding out what's going on."

"Do you want us to come with you?" Bucky asks, making an attempt to get up from his seat.

Steve waves him off. "It's okay. I'll keep you guys updated."

"Hey," Natasha says, grabbing his hand and stopping him before he goes. "It's good news. I'm sure it is."

Steve smiles. "Yeah."

His smile fades as he walks away, his gut twisting as the anxiety takes hold of him again. He doesn't want to get himself worked up over nothing. The results were fine. They had to be.

Just like JARVIS had said, Tony is already in the lab talking with Bruce and Helen. Steve approaches them, his eyes meeting Tony's for a moment, but for once he can't read him. That sinking feeling in the pit of his gut returns and he finds himself cradling the small bump.

"Is everything okay?" Steve asks, worry etched on his face. "I got the message to come down here."

"They have the results," Tony says and he takes Steve's hand. He leads Steve over to the exam bed and helps him sit down. "They want to look at the baby."

"Why?" Steve directs his attention to the two scientists. "What's wrong?"

"We just want to make sure everything is okay," Bruce replies, his voice calm. Steve doesn't find it reassuring.

"I thought the baby was fine. What's changed?"

Helen exchanges a look with Bruce, then she says, “Strange has been right. The serum is interfering with the pregnancy.”

Steve’s heart drops and he leans back slightly, his hands gripping the edges of the bed. He searches both of their faces for something—anything—reassuring. “Okay. What’s happening exactly?”

Bruce leans against the counter and takes a deep breath. “Your body is essentially at war with itself. The serum is trying to regulate everything, keep your body in peak condition, but the pregnancy is…throwing that off. It’s creating kind of a feedback loop, where your cells are regenerating too quickly, almost overcompensating, which is why we believe you’re feeling all that pain.”

Helen takes over. “And we think it might be transferring to the baby.”

“Is that why I’m sick?” Steve asks.

Helen nods. “Possibly. The serum is unpredictable in this context. I want to be sure it isn’t harming the baby in any way.”

“And if it is…I’d have to…” Steve exhales and squeezes his eyes shut. He feels someone take his hand and he opens his eyes, finding Tony even closer to him.

“We don’t want to do that,” Tony says sternly. “What can we do?”

Bruce runs a hand through his hair, glancing at Helen before answering. “We could try to suppress the serum, at least partially. It’s dangerous, though. Your body relies on it now and any suppression could affect your health.”

“I’m already being affected. Do what you have to do for the baby,” Steve says, wrapping a protective hand over his stomach.

Helen nods. “Okay. If it’s alright with you I’d like to take a look at the baby.”

Steve is instructed to lie back and he lifts up his shirt, exposing the bump to everyone in the room. Tony smiles softly when he catches sight of it and he places a hand over it. Steve reaches down and lays a hand over Tony’s, and they share a smile.

“It’s gonna be fine,” Tony whispers and he ducks down to kiss Steve softly.

When Helen begins, Steve keeps his eyes on the screen, his heart racing as he waits to see a visual of his unborn child, maybe even hear their heartbeat.

“Are you okay?” Bruce asks and Steve looks over at him. “Your heart rate increased.”

“Nervous,” Steve admits, and he squeezes Tony’s hand.

“There they are,” Helen says, those words capturing Steve’s attention and he glances back at the screen, following her finger. “There’s your baby.”

A smile breaks across Steve's face. He's seen images of his child before, but each time it brings him happiness. "Are they okay?" he asks, his eyes never leaving the screen and the quick fluttering of his child's heartbeat.

"So far I haven't detected any abnormalities," Helen says.

Steve breathes out a sigh of relief.

"We want to keep any eye on things," Bruce says. "Just to be on the safe side."

"In case it progresses?" Steve asks and Bruce nods. "Okay. But if you can suppress the serum that will help, right?"

"It could," Helen replies and she continues to study the baby's development. "But it puts you at risk."

"I don't care. Just make sure the baby is okay. I can handle this."

Tony squeezes Steve's hand and Steve looks up at him.

"I can," Steve assures.

Tony says nothing and looks away, setting his gaze on the screen. Steve keeps their fingers interlocked, hoping it's enough to reassure his husband.

He could do this. Whatever happened, he could face it and defeat it. He's faced many challenges in the past. This was just another he needed to overcome. And if it meant saving the life of his child, then he was going to do whatever it took.

Chapter End Notes

I finally got around to this one. I've been busy with work and then I got sick. Also a bit of writers block but I think I'll be fine now. I have a few ideas but I'm always open to more!

Thank you for being so patient and understanding! I'll update soon!

# Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve's body still aches the moment he opens his eyes. Another restless night, the pain so intense it kept him awake for hours. He didn't voice his complaints though, not wanting to disrupt Tony from his sleep. It's bad enough Tony's sleep schedule is all over the place. It's gotten better over the years, but occasionally he'll suffer from insomnia and decide to work his overactive brain until the sun comes up.

For once he went to bed at a decent time and had no issues staying asleep. So when Steve woke up with a gasp because of the ache in his muscles, he suffered in silence, gripping his pillow and squeezing his eyes shut as he tried to focus on something other than the painful spasms. He'd let out a whimper every now and then, the sound sometimes causing Tony to stir. But he never fully woke up, and Steve was glad for it.

Steve turns his head toward his left, finding Tony's side of the bed empty. Steve lays a hand over that spot, finding the sheets still warm. He must have only gotten up some time ago. It was rare for Tony to be the first to wake up; Steve was usually up first to start off his day with a morning run and then a shower, followed by preparing the two of them coffee and breakfast before they spent the day dealing with briefings and missions or lazing about in their home.

It seems like his routine is falling apart now. He couldn't run on the track without feeling lightheaded and out of breath. And now he couldn't even pull himself out of bed to make breakfast and make sure his husband was taking care of himself. He knew Tony was capable of feeding himself and didn't need Steve to feed him, but Steve liked making breakfast. He loved preparing meals for them and the way Tony's eyes would light up whenever he had him sample a new dish. It was domestic and every bit of that simple life Steve had envisioned for himself. Some days they couldn't live that quiet, peaceful life, but when the opportunity arose, Steve grasped onto it tight with both hands. He couldn't do that now.

He doesn't register the tears spilling from the corner of his eyes until he feels wetness along his cheek. He raises an arm to wipe the tears away, feeling like an idiot for getting so worked up over the fact that he couldn't scramble Tony some eggs. It's more than just that, though. Deep down he knows he's slowly fading away.

He squeezes his eyes shut when more tears try to flow. He didn't want to think like that. Helen and Bruce were working around the clock to figure out a solution. Their attempts so far haven't been successful, but Steve held onto hope that they'd get a breakthrough. He refused to give up.

Steve forces himself out of bed despite the way his body protests. Every move he makes toward the connected bathroom just brings on more aches and pains. He grits his teeth and uses the wall to keep himself upright. Calling for Tony might be the better option but Steve wants to do this by himself. He wasn't going to become weak.

It takes him longer than usual to get into the shower but he manages, sighing softly when the hot water cascades down his body, bringing a temporary relief to his muscles. He contemplates staying under the water a little longer, only to remember that Tony was probably downstairs waiting for him. Steve washes quickly, then he shuts off the water and steps out, almost losing his balance when black spots dance around his vision.

“Please don’t,” he begs quietly, holding onto the wall while he waits for the dizziness to pass. The last thing he needs is to collapse and worry Tony.

It takes a couple of minutes for Steve to regain himself, then once he’s sure he’s okay, he exits the bathroom and throws on a simple tee shirt and some sweatpants. He studies his reflection in the full length mirror on Tony’s side of the room, turning toward the side to examine his baby bump. He’s officially seventeen weeks today and he’s happy to know that despite the turmoil going through his body, his unborn child is still growing and thriving.

“I can’t wait to feel you move, little one,” he says softly while he runs a hand over the curve of his belly.

He carefully makes his way down the stairs, holding onto the rail to avoid tripping and stumbling down. He reaches the bottom and that’s when he smells the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. Tony is in the kitchen, standing near the stove as he cooks up some bacon and eggs. Steve watches him for a moment, smiling when Tony jams out to whatever song is currently playing in his head. Steve smiles. He’d never get tired of seeing his husband so happy.

Pretty soon their child would be joining them, and Steve can already picture Tony as a father. Tony was a good man, always ready to protect those he loves, even if that meant sacrificing himself. He’d do the same for their son or daughter; their child would be Tony’s priority, and he would do a damn good job at showing them how much he loved and cared about them.

Tony turns around to grab a couple of plates from the cupboard, catching Steve lingering. “Hey, honey. You okay?”

“Hmm?” Steve blinks, clearing his mind. “Yeah,” he says with a smile. “I’m okay. What are you doing?”

“I figured you wanted to sleep in so I decided to make breakfast. You should be proud of me for not burning the toast.”

Steve chuckles and he comes over to Tony, leaning in to peck him on the cheek. “I’m so damn proud. You didn’t have to make me breakfast, though. I can—”

“Nuh-uh.” Tony shakes his head and turns away to finish up the eggs. “I got this. Go sit down in the living room and I’ll bring you a plate.”

Steve rolls his eyes, but a smile forms on his lips. “Fine. Don’t burn down the kitchen.”

Tony scoffs. “We just celebrated me not burning the toast. I think I’m capable of keeping the kitchen in tip top shape. Now go before I make you.”

Steve chuckles and shakes his head. “Fine. I’m going.”

If he’s being honest, he’d prefer to sit down and relax for a moment. The last time he checked there’s no briefings or the world needing saving. Nick has been great about keeping Steve and Tony away from the action. Sometimes Steve misses leaving the compound, but then he’s reminded of the one life that needs him to keep safe, and he’s content just staying in.

Tony returns a few minutes later with a glass of orange juice and a plate piled with eggs, bacon, blueberries, and toast. Steve smiles and accepts the food, for once not feeling too sick to his stomach to consume anything.

“I’m pretty proud of myself.” Tony beams and places his hands on his hips. “Maybe let me make dinner next.”

“Sure.” Steve nods and he pops a blueberry into his mouth. “Did you defrost the chicken?”

“Son of a bitch. You know what sounds good tonight? Pizza!”

“That does sound good. I can go for that,” Steve says and he picks up some of the egg with the fork.

“Oh shit.”

Steve frowns and looks over at Tony. “What?”

“Bruce. They have another trial,” Tony replies, still glancing down at his phone.

“Now?”

“I guess. How do you feel about taking your breakfast to go?”

“Not great.”

“Okay. Just take your time and I’ll let him know we’ll stop by later.”

Steve nods and pulls apart the toast, bringing it up to his lips and nibbling on it. “I wonder if this is it.”

Tony shrugs and slips his phone back into his pocket. “I hope so,” he says and sits down beside Steve, his eyes roaming over to the ugly bruises on Steve’s arm and the newest one from the IV they had to insert into his right hand when the last trial failed.

Steve catches him staring and he reaches for Tony’s hand. Their eyes meet and Steve shoots him a smile. “It’s fine. I’ll heal.”

“I just hate them poking you so damn much.” Tony scrubs a hand over his face.

“I know. Maybe this will be the last time. I’m feeling better today.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” Steve nods but doesn’t bring up the painful muscle spasms and dizzy spells. “I can eat. That’s good, right?”

A small smile forms on Tony’s face and he gently squeezes Steve’s hand. “Yeah. I just worry. What if we’re making the wrong choice?”

“You wanted to keep the baby.”

“So did you.”

“Tony, they’ll figure it out. I trust them to help me and stabilize the serum. I’ll be fine,” Steve assures and he leads Tony’s hand to his belly. “Feel that? Baby’s getting bigger. They’re fine.”

Tony hums in acknowledgement and he scoots closer. Steve moves the plate out of the way to make room for Tony, and Tony leans in, laying his head over the swell of Steve’s belly.

“Hey, kiddo. Promise me one thing will you? Take it easy on your—Pops? Honey, what did we decide?” Tony looks up at Steve.

“Papa is fine.” Steve smiles and threads his fingers through Tony’s hair. “Keep talking to them.”

“Pretty sure it’s a girl.”

“Oh yeah? What makes you say that?”

“Because I’m terrified of having a boy and him turning out just like me.”

“I’m not,” Steve says softly and Tony scoffs. “Honest. He’ll be so smart and kind.”

“Maybe smart…” Tony trails off, still moving his hand along the bump.

“Tony.” Tony looks up and Steve smiles. “He’s going to be amazing just like you.”

“You really think so? I guess sometimes I wonder if I’m cut out for this.”

“Our child isn’t even here yet and you’re already a wonderful father. You care so much that you’re willing to do anything to make sure they’re okay.”

“It’s for you too, you know. I can’t live without you, honey. I love you both so damn much.” Tony presses his lips to Steve’s belly. “Behave, kid. Please take it easy on your papa. Please.”

Steve smiles and continues to run his fingers through Tony’s hair. It was moments like this that Steve loved the most. He hopes to have many more of them.

Chapter End Notes

I’m updating quickly today. Today is my son’s birthday so I’ll be busy later. I wanted to write something fluffy before things get worse. I’ll update when I can!

# Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve lies back on the exam bed and exhales. Tony stands beside him, their hands interlocked as Bruce and Helen prepare for another trial. Steve's stomach churns at the sight of the clear liquid he's about to be injected with. He glances down at his right arm, the scar from the last injection still on his skin. The serum hadn't come through and healed the wound or the bruises, meaning the last attempt to stabilize the serum had failed. He wonders if this time they'll get it right.

"How are you feeling?" Helen asks, laying a comforting hand over Steve's shoulder.

He looks up at her and smiles. "I'm okay. Just a little nervous."

"I know." Helen smiles sympathetically. "We're hoping this is the last one. I'm sure it's taking a toll on you."

"Just a few sleepless nights."

Tony looks over at Steve when he hears this. Steve doesn't look his way but he squeezes his hand to assure him that he was fine. He's been through worse. He could get through this.

"We're going to begin," Bruce says, coming over with the needle.

Steve offers his left arm this time and turns away to avoid watching the needle enter his skin. Tony glances down at Steve and they share a smile. It's just the distraction Steve needs.

As soon as the needle pierces his skin, Steve winces and grips Tony's hand tighter.

"Just Breathe, sweetheart," Tony says softly. "Almost there."

Steve grits his teeth and tries to steadily breathe through his nose. A chill runs through his veins as the serum enters his bloodstream. Steve's face grows pale and a wave of nausea washes over him.

"I don't feel good," he gasps, beads of sweat forming on his brow. "Tony, I don't feel good. I don't…"

Bruce quickly moves to Steve's side, checking the monitors. "Steve, stay with us. It's just a reaction; we anticipated some side effects."

Tony grabs a cool cloth, placing it on his forehead. "Breathe through it. Focus on my voice, honey."

Steve's breathing quickens as dizziness overtakes him, a sharp reminder of the risks involved. He thinks about the baby and if they're being affected. "The baby…are they…" he manages,

his vision blurring.

The last thing Steve becomes aware of is Tony calling his name. Then everything goes black.

---

Steve's eyes flutter open to the dim lighting of the recovery room. Blinking against the brightness, he turns his head, finding Tony sitting in a chair next to him. Tony jolts in his seat when he sees Steve waking up, a look of relief washing over his face.

"Hey, sleeping beauty." Tony smiles and he leans forward. "You gave us quite a scare."

"What happened?" Steve croaks, his throat dry.

Tony understands immediately and he gets up, crossing the room to pour Steve a cup of water from the plastic pitcher. "This should help," he says, returning to Steve's side. "How are you feeling?"

"Exhausted." Steve takes the cup and drinks some of the water. "And my head hurts. Did it work?"

Tony heaves out a sigh. "We don't know yet. You passed out right after the injection. Bruce and Helen are still running tests."

"Great," Steve mutters and rubs at his temples. "I was hoping for a smooth ride."

"Me, too."

"How's the baby?"

"Good. Little guy is strong. Maybe even stronger than you."

Steve perks up. "It's a boy?"

"I don't know," Tony says and Steve rolls his eyes. Tony chuckles. "Could be. I guess I don't know what to call them."

"What if it is a boy?" Steve smiles and takes Tony's hand. "A little you."

Tony scoffs. "Please take that back. You don't want two of me."

Steve hums, a smile forming over his face. "I wouldn't care. He'd be perfect."

Tony's eyes flicker to the bump and he reaches out, laying his palm over Steve's belly. "This kiddo is something else."

Steve frowns. "What do you mean?"

"According to Helen, he's not being affected at all by this. At least not like the way you are. It's odd."

“You want our baby to be affected?”

“No. God no. I’m just saying it’s…I don’t know. Bruce will probably let us know what he finds. For now just take it easy.”

Steve huffs. “That’s all I do these days.”

“I know.” Tony smiles softly and he gently rubs Steve’s belly. “The baby needs you to focus on yourself for a bit. You need to build up your strength.”

Steve nods and places his hand over Tony’s. “You’re right. I want to be okay.”

“You will.” Tony leans in and softly kisses Steve. “Now rest. I’ll be right here when you wake up.”

---

The next couple of weeks are spent with more tests and more trial runs. The latest attempt had been another failure, leaving both Steve and Tony disappointed. Steve was already nearing twenty weeks and they still had no idea how to stabilize the serum.

“This is exhausting,” Steve complains as they make their way down to the lab for another attempt.

Tony nods in agreement and grabs Steve’s hand. “I know. They feel pretty good about this one.”

“I hope so. I’m just so tired.”

“You’re also cooking a bun in your oven.” Tony chuckles and reaches over to gently pat Steve’s protruding belly.

Steve smiles and lays a hand over the bump. “Baby is growing. I think pretty soon we’ll get to feel her move.”

Tony stops in his tracks. “Her?”

Steve shrugs. “Maybe. I kind of feel like the baby is a girl. She’d still be like you.”

“What if I want her to look like you? With your baby blues…no, wait! All the boys would be trouble for her. She’s not dating until she’s thirty-five.”

Steve chuckles. “Someone’s a little overprotective,” he says and they keep walking.

“Maybe,” Tony mutters. “But I have to be. You and the baby are all that matter to me. I just want you both to be okay.”

“We will be. We have you.”

Steve stops and Tony stops with him, then Steve leans in to connect their lips. They pull apart when someone clears their throat and they look over to find Bruce waiting for them.

“Sorry,” Bruce murmurs out an apology. “We’re ready when you are. Steve, are you feeling okay today?”

“I guess so. Let’s get this over with,” Steve replies, determined for this to go right.

---

For the first time in months Steve is starting to feel like himself. The nausea has finally dissipated and the fatigue isn’t too bad. The body aches come and go, but he just thinks it’s because of all the added weight in his middle. Everyday the baby was getting bigger and bigger, and pretty soon Steve would be able to feel his little one move. The books said after twenty weeks he should feel the baby’s movements. He just hit the twenty-one week mark, so he’s anticipating feeling the baby’s little kicks.

With Tony working at the tower for the day, Steve seeks out his friends. They meet up in the common room to discuss preparations for Sam and Bucky’s wedding. Natasha brings up a baby shower, and much to Bucky’s relief, the subject is changed.

“We can have the shower here,” Natasha says. “There’s plenty of space.”

Steve nods, liking the idea of having it at home instead of renting out a venue like Tony had done for their wedding reception.

“Maybe something small?” Steve suggests. “I don’t need a lot of people.”

“Are we doing this after the wedding?” Bucky asks and he takes a sip of his coffee.

“Yeah, right?” Steve looks to Natasha for confirmation. “I should be close to thirty weeks after the wedding. I’d rather do it then.”

“Good idea.” Natasha nods. “We don’t want to throw it so close to your due date.”

“Please don’t have this kid at my wedding.” Bucky chuckles and reaches across to pat Steve’s belly.

“I’m not counting on it.” Steve smiles and he fondly rubs his belly. “I just wish this little guy would move.”

Natasha frowns. “I thought it was a girl?”

“It feels like a boy now. Helen said we can find out next week.”

“You’re naming the baby James, right?” Bucky asks.

“Uh—”

“You mean Natasha,” Natasha cuts in.

“No, I said James. Plus he just said it’s a boy.”

“He said it *could* be a boy. If it is a boy then it’s Nathaniel.”

“James is better! And he’s my best friend so I’m sure he’s gonna name the kid after me.”

“Well, I was there when he was thawed so I claimed him.”

Steve tries to tune out the bickering and he rubs at his head when it begins to throb. It’s not until he feels something shift in his belly does he gasp. He waits, thinking maybe he imagined it, but then he feels it again.

“Guys!” he exclaims, cutting through their argument. “I think the baby just moved. I felt a kick.”

Natasha is out of her seat in seconds and she rushes to Steve’s side, shoving Bucky’s hand out of the way so she can feel. A minute or two passes without any more movement.

“I don’t feel anything.” Natasha frowns.

“That’s because you’re not the best friend,” Bucky says and she flips him off.

“I swear I felt the baby move,” Steve says, glancing down at his belly.

“Maybe next time.” Natasha smiles and she fondly rubs the bump.

Chapter End Notes

I was finally able to update this one! I tried earlier but I got busy with my son’s birthday party. It was a day! But a lot of fun!

Anyway, I wanted to end this chapter a little fluffy before more angsty stuff happens! 😈

# Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The latest trial appears to have worked. Steve is feeling better, or at least better than he has in months. His body is still adapting to the pregnancy and going through various changes, but nothing Helen doesn't deem concerning. Everything is normal, and for the first time in a while, he's able to enjoy being pregnant.

He allows Natasha to whisk him away on a shopping trip. He was in dire need of a new wardrobe and Natasha encouraged him to get out of the compound for a little while to buy himself and the baby a few things. Tony assured Steve he could just order everything and have it delivered, but Steve liked the idea of going out for a couple of hours. He managed to talk Tony into tagging along, so now the three of them were exploring every baby boutique in Manhattan.

Tony lingers behind while Natasha hooks her arm around Steve's and drags him into the third store. They still had a few hours until they were needed back to meet up with Sam and Bucky for cake tasting. Just thinking about trying various cake flavors has Steve's mouth watering.

The first rack Natasha rushes over to consists of beautiful dresses all organized by color and size. She picks up a baby blue dress and smiles.

"This one is adorable. If she has your eyes this will make them pop."

"My eyes huh?" Steve chuckles and takes the dress to look over it, trying to imagine a little girl with his eyes in it. But his brain won't allow him to conjure up such an image. He frowns and places it back. "I don't think she'll have my eyes."

"Okay, well even if she has Tony's—" Natasha finds a red dress. "—this would look so cute on her. And it's his color."

Tony pops up next to Steve, a frown of disapproval appearing over his face. "I can guarantee you that we're having a boy."

Natasha scowls. "It's little Natasha. Tony Junior is a big no."

"Agreed." Steve nods, ignoring the way Tony pouts at him. "But I do think it's a boy. I just… feel it."

"You said girl last week!" Natasha exclaims.

Steve smiles sheepishly and softly rubs at his belly. "It's a boy. I know it is."

"Fine." Natasha rolls her eyes and hangs up the dress. "Let's look at the boy stuff for Nathaniel."

She takes Steve by the hand and leads him to the opposite side of the store. She helps him pick out a few neutral colors despite his hunch, reminding him that he could still be having a girl.

“Helen says we’ll be able to find out this week,” Steve says as he browses through a few pajamas. He likes the ones with little spaceships and planets.

“I’m going to that one,” Natasha says and she shows him a shirt that reads: My Aunt Is Cooler Than You

Steve laughs. “I can’t pass up on that one.”

They spend a good thirty minutes in the store looking at all the different articles of clothing and other baby necessities. All Tony can do is shake his head as he swipes his card at the register. Steve just smiles and leans in to peck Tony on the cheek.

“Now where?” Natasha asks, once they leave the store, hooking her arm around Steve’s once more. “We still need to find you clothes.”

“Don’t forgot we have a cake tasting thing,” Steve reminds her.

“That’s not until later.” Natasha waves him off.

“How about lunch?” Tony suggests. “Honey, you need to refuel.”

“I feel okay.” Steve tries to explain but Tony shakes his head.

“Please? I just want to make sure you and the baby are okay.”

Steve gives in with a nod. “Okay. Lunch sounds good. Pizza?”

“I can go for that.” Natasha agrees.

“With black olives, banana peppers, artichokes and maybe mustard.”

Both Natasha and Tony make a face at Steve’s unusual request. “What?” Steve asks with a frown. “I’m hungry.”

“What’s wrong with a simple pepperoni?” Tony asks, one brow raising.

“Baby wants artichokes.”

“And mustard?” Natasha grimaces.

Steve chuckles and fondly pats his belly. “Yep.”

Tony just shakes his head. “At least you’re eating,” he says, a smile forming over his lips. He takes Steve’s hand and smooths his thumb over Steve’s knuckles.

Steve smiles back.

Despite the big lunch Steve had earlier with Natasha and Tony, he finds himself hungry again later on when both he and Natasha meet up with Sam and Bucky. Sam offered to take them all out to dinner after the cake sampling, and Steve would be lying if he claimed he wasn't looking forward to eating again. It was just proof his little one was growing and demanding more.

The bakery Sam and Bucky have chosen is a cute little establishment in Brooklyn. Steve doesn't recognize it, and he wonders if the building used to be a place he used to know. The city has changed a lot since his time, but it was still home to him. Maybe one day he and Tony can purchase a nice brownstone. Bucky had been wanting to do it with Sam, and the more Steve thinks about it, the more he likes the idea. Maybe he can find a place next to his friends and their children can grow up together just like Steve had done with Bucky.

"That one looks good." Natasha softly nudges Steve's arm with her shoulder, snapping him out of his thoughts. He glances over at the cake she's referring to, his mouth watering at the sight of the chocolatey goodness.

"Which one do you think they'll decide on?" Steve leans in close for just Natasha to hear. "All of these cakes look good."

"I think you're just craving sweets, Rogers."

"Probably." Steve rubs his belly, hoping to feel the baby move. He thinks maybe the sugar will wake his little one up and finally give his friends a chance to feel all the kicks and rolls.

"Bucky will probably choose Vanilla," Natasha says.

Steve shakes his head. "He likes Red Velvet."

"Huh. At least it's not Carrot Cake."

"Hey! What's wrong with that?"

Natasha raises a brow. "Is that what you're craving?"

Steve eyes the beautifully decorated carrot cake in the display case. "The baby is."

"Sure."

After everything is set up for them, they gather at a table and samples of different flavors of cake are placed in front of them. The woman assisting them goes over the flavors and various combinations that could be done, but Steve tunes out most of what she is saying. He's done this before when he married to Tony.

He looks over at his friends, smiling to himself as he thinks about them tying the knot and building a life together. In the beginning it didn't seem like they would end up as anything other than coworkers. The tension between them was palpable and often led to bickering. It reminds Steve of all the times he didn't get along with Tony and how different they were. But as it would turn out, Tony was perfect for him, just like Sam was perfect for Bucky.

Steve mindlessly rubs at his belly, picturing his child one day having Sam and Bucky's kid to play with. He knows his friends would be incredible parents some day.

A piece of what he can only assume is strawberry based on the color alone is placed in front of him. He peers over at Natasha and she shrugs, but then picks up the little gold fork offered to them. The cake is delicious and moist—everything a cake should be, but truth be told, Steve is more interested in the chocolate one. Maybe his cravings were finally kicking in.

After a few more samples and friendly conversation, Steve begins to feel off. The next cake is Red Velvet and he can tell Bucky is eager to try it. So far he and Sam haven't decided which flavor they like the most. Steve wonders if this will be it.

He picks up his work and takes a bite, the rich flavor of the cake bursting across his taste buds. It's as good as it looks, and yet he can't find himself to enjoy it. His stomach churns, and for a moment he thinks maybe he overate. He sets the fork down and leans back in his seat, one hand falling to his belly. He can feel the small flutters of the baby; their movement seems stronger now, and he wonders if the sugar has finally entered their system.

"You okay?" Sam asks from across the table. Steve looks over at him and nods. "You don't look so good, man."

Bucky frowns. "You're sweating. What's wrong?"

Steve shakes his head again and opens his mouth to respond, but the words get lodged in his throat. He looks up at his friends again, only for dark spots to dance across his vision and warp the images of the people around him.

"Steve?" Nat places a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm gonna…pass out," Steve manages to say, his words startling his friends and they jump into action.

Bucky gets to him first. "It's gonna be okay, pal. We got you."

"I'll call 911," Sam says somewhere on Steve's left.

Steve doesn't try to protest, knowing deep down something is wrong. The trial had failed. Again.

Chapter End Notes

Today is a sad day! Tony 😭 okay I don't want to think about it so I wrote instead. He's still alive to me okay!

Anyway, this story was highly requested so I finally managed to finish the chapter. I think I'll bring back Strange 🤔 So much for the fluff! 😔

# Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A small groan escapes Steve's lips and he wraps an arm around himself. His other arm is draped over Bucky's shoulders, allowing most of his weight to be placed on his friend. Sam and Natasha are in front of them, urgently trying to wave down one of the medical staff members. Within minutes, a group of nurses offer their aid, leading the group toward an empty room.

While Bucky and Sam help Steve onto the bed, Natasha explains the situation to the staff. Helen appears a few minutes later, determined to help in any way she can.

"How are you feeling, Steve?" she asks and places a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"My stomach." Steve winces. "I feel like passing out."

"Can you describe your pain? Is it like cramping or just discomfort?"

"Discomfort…I think. I just feel sick."

Helen nods and lifts up his shirt, exposing the baby bump. She gently feels around. "Here?" She asks and when he shakes his head, she moves her hand under his belly button and presses down. "Baby is right here. I think I feel their head."

Steve peers down at her. "Do you think they're okay?"

"I'll do an ultrasound but first I want to listen to the heartbeat."

"Wait, I want Tony here."

"I'll find him." Natasha offers. She shoots Steve a reassuring smile, then she leaves the room in search of Tony.

"Do you want us here?" Bucky asks, moving to stand by Steve's side.

"Please? I'm kinda scared," Steve admits, and he grasps Bucky's hand, finding the cold metal comforting.

"We're not going anywhere." Sam assures with a smile, and he takes the spot on Steve's left. "You're gonna be okay, Cap."

Steve nods and forces a small smile, but deep down he senses something is wrong. He'd just have to wait until the ultrasound to know for sure.

With Tony by his side and his friends still in the room, Steve begins to feel a little better. He's still feeling a bit lightheaded and the nausea comes and goes, but he does his best to

overcome it. He's been through worse before. He could do it again, and yet something tells him he was up against his biggest challenge yet.

While Helen performs the ultrasound, Bruce looks over both Steve's and the baby's vitals.

"Heartbeat sounds good," Bruce informs and he shoots both Steve and Tony a smile. "Little one is tough."

"Look who his parents are," Tony says. "Or she."

"Actually…" Helen moves the transducer around for a moment then ceases her movement, a smile spreads across her face. "You were right, Stark. It's a boy."

Steve whips his head in the direction of the screen, his eyes locking on the image of his child. Of his son. His eyes grow misty. "It's a boy?" he asks, looking at Helen for confirmation despite just being told he was having a son.

She smiles and nods. "You're having a boy. Congratulations, both of you."

"I guess Natasha is out." Natasha frowns, then a smile appears over her face. "But Nathianal —"

"You mean James," Bucky cuts in.

"No, you mean Samuel," Sam says. "Little Sammy is cute. C'mon, Cap, tell him."

Steve chuckles and shakes his head. He ignores their banter and looks over at Tony and they share a smile. "We're having a boy," he says, his voice full of excitement and joy.

Tony leans in close and kisses Steve softly. They break apart and Steve turns back to look at the screen. His smile falters when he catches the concerned look on Helen's face.

Steve frowns. "Is everything okay?"

Helen glances over at him, then at Tony when he looks her way. She says nothing and directs her attention to Bruce, both of them having some kind of quiet conversation. Steve looks between them both, desperately waiting for one of them to tell him what was going on.

Before he can open his mouth to demand answers, Bruce orders everyone out of the room. Just like Steve expected, his friends hesitate to go.

"It's okay," Steve assures them. "It's fine."

Bucky still appears the most concerned, but he gives in and follows Sam and Natasha out of the room. Bruce follows them and makes sure the door closes all the way, then he turns back to Steve and Tony.

"We need to talk."

"What is it?" Tony asks, looking over at Helen. "What did you see?"

“Before you worry,” Helen starts, giving them her full attention. “The baby is fine.”

Steve releases a breath, relief washing over him. “Okay, then what’s wrong? Both of you look worried.”

Bruce sighs and walks over to the Stark Pad that’s laying on the counter. He picks it up and swipes through the data. “We got your results back, Steve…the trial didn’t work.”

Those words hit Steve like a physical blow. He grows quiet, too stunned to form any words. His brows crease as he tries to make sense of it all.

“But I…I was feeling fine. What happened today…I…” he stops, his voice cracking a bit. “What’s happening to me?”

Bruce hesitates for a moment, his eyes flickering to Tony for a moment, then he continues. “The baby…it’s taking more of the serum than we thought. It’s absorbing it faster than your body can keep up, which is why you’ve been feeling weaker, sicker. Your body is losing its enhanced abilities.”

Tony folds his arms over his chest, his eyes dark with concern. “We thought this was supposed to stabilize him.” Tony sighs and scrubs a hand over his face. “But it looks like…I guess Junior’s really hungry for the good stuff.”

Steve forces a smile but it doesn’t reach his eyes. A wave of guilt washes over him, creating a sinking feeling in his stomach.

“So…all of this. The nausea, the weakness, the pain—it’s all because of the baby?” he asks.

Bruce nods, a look of sympathy crossing over his face. “Your body is trying to keep up, but it’s getting drained faster than it can regenerate. That’s why you’re getting weaker. The baby is thriving, but it’s putting an enormous strain on you.”

Steve’s jaw clenches and his hands ball into fists. He stares down at his hands, hands that used to be indestructible, now tremble slightly.

“Okay. Is the baby…is he safe?” Steve asks, his eyes filling with tears.

“As far as we can tell, the baby’s developing normally—at least in terms of growth and vitals,” Helen says. “But we don’t know how it’s going to affect him long-term. It’s still too early for us to tell.”

Steve’s gaze drifts away, landing on the screen and the frozen image of his son. He can clearly make out his son’s head and arms, his tiny fingers and legs. He can even see his eyes, and he starts to wonder if they’ll be just like his or resemble Tony’s.

Deep down he knows he may never know. The weight of the situation presses down on him, a thousand conflicting emotions surging through him. He has always been known as the protector. The one who has battled against all odds and won. But now…he was being drained. And the one thing he wanted to protect most was the cause of it.

Tony lays a hand over Steve's shoulder, the touch comforting. "Can we have a minute?" Tony requests, and Steve just knows what the next few minutes are going to look like.

He's been dreading this conversation. For a while he believed they wouldn't have to have anymore difficult conversations. They should be arguing over baby names or what kind of food to serve at the baby shower. Maybe what college to send their son off to. Tony would say MIT, then Steve would disagree and argue their son should decide.

They should be talking about anything else. Not this.

Once Bruce and Helen are gone, Steve expects Tony to jump right into it, but when all he does is wander around the room and pace the floor, Steve begins to worry even more. It was evident this conversation was going to be difficult for the both of them.

"Just say it," Steve says, finally growing tired of the silence.

Tony stops his pacing and looks over at him. "Say what? How our son is slowly killing you?"

"He's not…"

"Did you hear what Bruce said? Your body isn't regenerating. What the hell do we now?" Those last words are said mostly to himself.

Steve heaves out a sigh. "I don't know."

Tony looks over at him. "Maybe it's not too late. You're only twenty-two weeks. I can schedule you for—"

"What? No. I'm keeping this baby. Tony, you wanted me to go through with this."

"That was before I knew how risky it was going to be!"

"You knew the risks then! What's changed?"

"You're getting worse. Bruce and Helen said you won't make it."

"No, they didn't."

"Not out loud."

Steve shakes his head and he places a hand over his belly. "I'm keeping the baby. Our son, Tony. I can't terminate. I can't."

Tony mutters a curse and runs a hand through his hair. He moves toward the door, his hand hovering over the knob.

"I'm keeping the baby," Steve says again, determined, and he watches the way Tony freezes. "I'm keeping our son. I saw his face. I feel him move. Just earlier we were shopping for him. I'm not giving up now."

Tony turns around, his face full of sorrow and guilt. “I can’t lose you.”

“You’re not.”

Tony comes closer, stopping until he’s standing in front of Steve. Steve takes both of his hands, his grip steady despite his weakness, and he looks into Tony’s eyes.

“You’re not going to lose me. We’re going to figure this out together.”

Tony’s eyes flicker with doubt. For a moment he allows himself to be vulnerable, his voice barely above a whisper. “I’m scared.”

Steve squeezes Tony’s hands, his own eyes full of understanding. “I know. But we can get through this.”

Tony swallows hard, the lump in his throat making it difficult to speak. He leans forward, resting his forehead against Steve’s. “Promise me.”

Steve closes his eyes. “I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry I haven’t updated in a while! I’m dealing with a bit of writers block and feeling unmotivated these days. I think I just need to take it easy.

I was able to update this one and I’ll try and work on another fic or the next chapter to this one. Thank you for being so patient! 😊

# Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Not one to give up so easily, Tony asks Helen and Bruce to try again. Steve knows his husband is just trying to help, but he wishes Tony would let it go. He's exhausted from both the pregnancy and the toll the experiments are taking on him. This wasn't how things were supposed to go. He should be enjoying his pregnancy and looking forward to the arrival of his son. That's all been ripped away from him now.

After another trial fails, Steve is ready to call it quits and deal with his issues some other way. But Tony refuses, stating Helen and Bruce were their best shot at stabilizing the serum and making sure the baby was healthy. Steve had his doubts. He wished he didn't. But he did.

"We can try again tomorrow," Tony says as they make their way into their home. He sounds tired and defeated. He's not the only one.

Steve stays silent and makes his way toward the sofa, one hand cradling his belly. He eases himself down onto the sofa and blows out a breath. The dizziness still lingers despite Bruce promising that it would go away after a few minutes. Steve's sure the ugly bruise on his right arm is still there.

"I can have Bruce and Helen prepare the lab in the morning," Tony continues, completely oblivious to the fact that Steve isn't listening and instead dozing off. "Honey?" Tony walks over and gently shakes Steve awake. "Did you hear me?"

"Huh?" Steve asks groggily. "Yeah. But I don't want to do this again tomorrow."

"Okay what about the following day?"

"Tony—"

"I just think we need to figure this out before next week. You'll be twenty-four weeks and who knows what could change."

"Tony, I don't want to do this at all."

Tony grows quiet and blinks at Steve. "I'm sorry, what did you say? I thought you wanted the baby?"

"I do want him. But this…the trials…I can't. My body aches and I'm exhausted."

Tony sighs and sits down beside Steve. He takes his hand. "And that's why we have to keep trying. For all we know you could be cured tomorrow."

Steve scoffs and looks down at the large bruise on his arm. "I doubt it. I'm sorry. I wish I could be more optimistic but right now I just want a break. I want to relax and enjoy as much

as I can before…"

"Before what?"

Steve heaves out a sigh and glances down. "Before it does get worse and I die."

Tony yanks his hand away and jumps to his feet. He steps away, putting some distance between them. "Don't fucking talk like that," he growls. Steve can see a mixture of anger and pain swimming in his eyes. "You said we would figure this out together. That's what I'm trying to do."

"I don't want to give up. I'm just being realistic. There have been no breakthroughs. If by some miracle I survive the next few months then great. But you and I know there's a chance of me not making it. You said it yourself."

"I didn't…they did! That's what they seemed so fucking worried about. I don't want you to die! And I know you don't either!" Tony yells

"Of course not!" Steve shouts back.

"Then why are you acting like death is the only option?"

Steve takes a deep, slow breath to calm himself. He feels the baby shift, the movement reminding him why he needs to be calmer. Bruce and Helen claimed his son was okay but Steve wasn't going to take any chances. He had to make sure he protected his little boy until the end.

"I'm not," Steve finally says, his voice low. He peers up at Tony, meeting his gaze. It's almost painful to look into his eyes and he feels a wave of guilt wash over him. "Come here," he urges softly.

Tony does, walking back over, but this time he kneels down in front of Steve. Steve wraps his arms around him, holding him tight. Tony releases a shaky breath.

"I'm sorry," Steve says. "I'm not giving up."

"It sounds like it," Tony says.

"I guess I was just trying to prepare myself for the worst outcome. We have to do that just in case."

Tony's body tenses under Steve's arms. Steve holds him tighter.

"I know," Tony finally says, his words barely audible but Steve picks them up.

He wonders if he'll eventually lose his keen hearing. Will his good vision go next? What about his asthma? His heart condition? He doesn't want to have to be tortured by his own body again.

But that's exactly what's happening.

“I want to stop it, too,” Steve says and Tony lifts his head to look up at him. “But I need a break right now.”

“I’m sorry I pushed you. I’m just…I’m scared,” Tony admits.

“Hey.” Steve gently lifts Tony’s chin up, and he smiles softly at him. “We’ll figure this out. We have your amazingly big brain.”

Tony chuckles softly. “It is pretty big, huh?”

“You’re so cocky. But I love you. And I love our son.”

Tony smiles and leans in closer so that he can rest his head over Steve’s belly. “Hey, kiddo,” he says softly to their son. “I love you. And your papa loves you. You have the whole Avengers team that loves you. We promise to keep you safe. I can’t wait to meet you.”

A sad smile breaks across Steve’s face. He can't wait to meet his son. He just hopes he’s lucky enough to survive to be able to.

---

Steve’s official twenty-four weeks along. His belly has grown more which he takes as a good sign. It meant his son was growing and thriving despite the difficult situation they’re both in. Steve tries not to think negative thoughts and instead focus on the positive ones. Like how he’s feeling his son move more and even Tony getting to experience the kicks and rolls the baby produces. Steve’s even started planning the nursery and he finds himself browsing for decor and other necessities.

That’s what he finds himself doing now. The weather is on the ugly side today, with dark clouds and rain on and off for most of the afternoon. Steve takes it upon himself to stay indoors and focus on preparing for the nursery. Tony is down in his lab doing God knows what, and Steve doesn’t want to bother him. He needed space too.

Steve’s not completely alone; he invited his friends over to help get their opinion on nursery themes and maybe add names to the list of baby names he’s started.

Natasha is sitting on the couch beside Steve, her hand over his belly as she patiently waits to feel any movement. Steve already told her he was asleep but she was willing to wait.

Bucky and Sam are lounging on the love seat nursing their beers. Steve watches with a hint of jealousy. He can’t really feel the effect of alcohol anymore due to the serum but he still misses sipping a cold beer after a long day.

“I felt something!” Natasha exclaims suddenly, breaking up the silence in the room.

“It was probably gas,” Sam teases and Natasha looks ready to toss a pillow at his head.

“That was him,” Steve assures and he takes Natasha’s hand, leading it more toward the left where he feels more of the movement. “Give him a minute.”

“Does he have a name yet?” Bucky asks, then he takes another swig from the beer bottle.

“Not yet. I’ve thought about after my father but…I don’t know. We’re not naming him after Tony’s,” Steve replies.

“Makes sense,” Sam says. “Samuel is a great name.”

Bucky rolls his eyes. “So is James.”

“And Nathaniel,” Natasha adds, narrowing her eyes at them.

Steve shakes his head and chuckles. “We have time to figure this out. I’ll add them to the list though.”

“How have you been feeling?” Bucky asks. Steve doesn’t miss the way a flash of worry appears on his face.

Steve sighs. “Tired mostly. Tony doesn’t want to give up with the trials but none of them are working. Or if they do it’s only temporary.”

“So what else can you do?” Natasha asks.

“I don’t know. We’re trying to figure it out. He’s scared. If nothing works and I…”

“Hey,” Sam says and Steve looks over at him. “Don’t think like that. You’re gonna make it. Both you and the kid.”

Steve smiles softly but it doesn’t reach his eyes. He wishes he could believe that, but with his body slowly draining every day, he doesn’t know how he’s supposed to survive the next few months.

“If only I had more serum,” he says.

Bucky perks up for a moment, then he frowns. Steve notices immediately and eyes him closely.

“Buck, what are you thinking?”

“I think I know where we can find you more serum. But you’re not gonna like it,” Bucky replies.

Steve inhales sharply. “I’ll try anything.”

Chapter End Notes

👀

# Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> I took the day off from work since I'm still sore from my recent fall and honestly I needed a day to rest. I've been on the go for weeks 😩
>
> I was able to at least write something and it was the story so I'm excited! Hope y'all enjoy!

Steve makes his way down to Tony's lab, and that's where he finds his husband tinkering away while music blares from the overhead speakers. Tony doesn't acknowledge him at first, too absorbed in his work to notice anything around him. Steve stops just beside Tony, his eyes roaming over the random Iron Man parts, but then something else catches his eye and he frowns.

"You're drinking again?" Steve gestures angrily to the glass of what he can only assume is whiskey.

"Jesus Christ!" Tony startles and he puts down his tools and turns in his chair to face Steve. "Way to give a man a heart attack."

"What are you doing?"

"Keeping myself distracted. I keep going over ways to fix you but I got nothing so this is helping."

"The tinkering or the alcohol?"

Tony exhales and reaches for the half empty glass. "I just needed something to take off the edge."

"You said you would quit," Steve says, leaning against the workbench and crossing his arms over his chest.

"Please just…I don't need this right now, Steve. Seeing you get worse…I can't take it. This helps."

Steve says nothing and comes to stand behind Tony, placing his hands over his shoulders and rubbing them. "I know. I didn't think starting a family would be this difficult."

"We've faced some pretty big challenges but this one…" Tony trails off, his voice laced with emotion.

“Yeah.” Steve nods. Then after a moment of silence, he speaks again. “Bucky suggested I get more serum to help me.”

Tony scoffs. “Sorry. It’s a good idea, but there’s no more of it.”

“Actually…there is. He knows a base in Siberia.”

Tony tenses beneath Steve’s fingertips and he quickly spins around, forcing Steve to let go. “What? Hydra’s serum?”

“It’s all that’s left.”

“No. Absolutely not.”

“Tony, I need more serum.”

“So injecting yourself with the bad stuff is your brilliant idea?” Tony snaps, and he turns away again to resume working.

“I don’t like it either but what choice do we have?” Steve asks.

“Better ones!” Tony shouts, tossing his tools down so harshly it startles Steve. Tony jumps up to his feet and faces Steve. “No offense but raiding a Hydra base in search of a serum with a terrible track record is the worst idea I’ve ever heard.”

Steve’s jaw clenches and he rolls his hands into tight fists. “We don’t have any more options. Bruce and Helen can’t help me and Strange—”

“Maybe we need to talk to him again. He has to know something.”

“He wouldn’t listen to me.”

“Then I’ll make him listen.” Tony pushes past Steve and heads toward the exit.

“Where are you going?”

“To talk to the wizard.”

---

Tony doesn’t bother knocking when he arrives at the Sanctum Sanctorum. The doors creak open as he steps inside, the hesitation he felt before returns and gnaws at the back of his mind. For a moment he thinks he shouldn’t have bothered or at least brought Steve with him, but the idea of turning around and leaving isn’t an option. He needed answers.

Strange stands at the center of the room, his hands clasped behind his back and an annoyed expression on his face. “Stark,” he greets, his voice calm but with a trace of curiosity. “To what do I owe this…unannounced visit?”

Tony doesn’t bother with small talk. “Steve needs help and you’re the only guy left on my list. Don’t make me regret coming here.”

Strange arches a brow and steps closer. “I’m assuming this is about his pregnancy? He’s what, twenty-three weeks now?”

“Close. Look, I need your help. He’s getting worse and Bruce and Helen are all out of ideas. It’s killing him.”

Strange frowns. “The serum wasn’t designed for this. It’s rewriting his biology to adapt—”

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” Tony snaps, the edge in his voice sharp enough to cut. “You were right. Is that what you want to hear?”

“I won’t brag. I’m not like you. But…” Strange motions for Tony to follow him deeper into the Sanctum. “magic isn’t as straightforward, Stark. It comes with its own risks and complications.”

“If there’s even a chance you can save him,” Tony says, his voice breaking slightly. “Then I need you to do it. Forget the risk. Just…tell me there’s a way.”

Strange stops in front of an ancient, glowing artifact, his fingers tracing along its intricate design. “There are spells, rituals…that might be able to stabilize his condition. But like I said, they won’t come without consequences, and they might not work the way you hope.”

“I don’t care. I’d rather take that risk than lose him. I could end up losing both him and my son.”

“Perhaps one is only worth saving.”

“What?” Tony freezes, the words hitting him like a punch to the gut. “Save one? Why just one! Why the hell would I do that!”

Strange heaves out a sigh and turns to look at Tony. “There’s a reason I refuse to get involved, Stark. I couldn’t tell Steve before but…”

“But what? Tell me!”

“Do you have any idea what’s growing inside of Steve? The serum is amplifying and altering the child in ways that we cannot predict. If your son lives…the world could be at risk.”

“At risk? How? It’s just a baby!” Tony snaps.

“Now, yes, but I’ve seen what he’s capable of. He’s a threat.”

Tony steps closer, his anger radiating off of him. “What did you see?”

Strange’s expression darkness. He exhales slowly, folding his arms behind his back as though bracing himself for what he's about to say. “I've seen a future where your son grows into something…unstoppable. The serum in his blood doesn’t just make him stronger or faster–it enhances everything. He becomes more than human, more than you or Steve can imagine.”

Tony’s jaw tenses, his hands curling into fists. “That doesn't sound like a threat.”

“He won't know how to control it. His power grows unchecked, warping his sense of morality, of humanity. He’s not just stronger, Tony. He’s cruel. He tears apart the very world you’re trying to save.”

Tony shakes his head, refusing to believe the words being said to him. “No. No, you’re wrong. That's not my son. Steve and I would never let that happen.”

“You won't be able to stop it. He’s too powerful for you.”

“Then Steve–”

“Won't make it. He dies in childbirth.”

Tony takes another step closer, his voice trembling with rage and desperation. “If you saw this, then you also saw how to stop it. There's always another way.”

“Sometimes the only way to stop something is to prevent it from ever beginning. I can try to save Steve’s life, but as for your son…I can't let him live.”

“You think you're so righteous, don't you?” Tony growls. “Playing God, deciding who gets to live or die. Well, guess what, Strange–you don't know my son. You don't know *me*. I've rewritten fate before, and I'll do it again.”

Strange shakes his head. “This isn’t a game, Stark. I’m trying to warn you.”

“I told you not to make me regret coming here. If you won’t help me, then stay out of my way.”

Without another word, Tony turns on his heel and storms out of the Sanctum, slamming the door hard behind him.

“J,” he says once he’s back in his car. “Assemble the team. We’re going to Siberia.”

# Chapter 17

Tony quietly steps through the front door, careful not to disturb his sleeping husband. JARVIS had warned Tony that Steve was asleep and for him to be quiet when he arrived home. Tony feels some relief knowing Steve was getting the rest he desperately needed.

But now that he's home and expected to share with Steve everything Strange had said, Tony finds he can't form the words. How the hell is he supposed to tell Steve that there was a chance their son was destined for evil and not good?

Tony makes his way over to where Steve is sleeping, a sad sigh escaping him as he tries to figure out a way to break the news. Steve looks so peaceful, or at least somewhat. The past few weeks have been dreadful for him, and the last thing Tony wants to do is disturb that peace.

He gets down on one knee beside Steve so that he's eye level with Steve's belly. Tony places a hand over the bump, expecting to feel their son move around. But their little boy must be sleeping because Tony feels nothing.

Tony leans in close and places his hand over Steve's belly. "Hey, squirt. I bet you're sleeping right now and I hope I don't wake you but…please take it easy on your papa. I know we've had this talk before and you're probably sick of hearing my voice but please…I can't lose him."

Tony feels his son push against his palm and a small smile forms over his face. "Is that a yes?"

Steve stirs and Tony looks up at him right as Steve's eyes slowly open. "Hey," Steve greets, his voice thick with sleep. "When did you get in?"

"Just a few minutes ago. JARVIS warned me to be quiet so I don't wake you. Guess I failed."

Steve smiles and reaches down to thread his fingers through Tony's hair. "It's okay. I felt the baby move. Was that from you?"

"Yeah," Tony replies. "I was just having a talk with the kid."

Steve clicks his tongue. "Already scolding him, huh?"

"Maybe. No. Just making a deal with him, that sort of thing. How did you sleep?"

"Fine. I still feel tired though."

"Then go back to sleep. I'll figure out dinner."

"You? Might as well just order a pizza."

Tony grins. "That's exactly what I was gonna do," he says, and he pulls himself up to his feet.

“What did Strange say?” Steve asks and Tony freezes. Sensing some hesitation, Steve frowns. “Tony? What did he say?”

Tony exhales slowly. “He can’t help us.”

“He can’t or he won’t?”

Tony hesitates, wracking his brain for a quick response. He can’t tell Steve the truth. Not now.

“I don’t know,” he says lamely.

Steve takes a deep, slow breath and absentmindedly rubs at his belly. “Okay. Should I try talking to him?”

“He won’t talk to us about this anymore. We need a new plan.”

“We’re running out of ideas.”

“You suggested we get more serum, right? Then that’s what we’re gonna do,” Tony says.

Steve frowns. “But you said—”

“I know what I said, but we have to do something. I can’t take seeing you like this anymore.”

“This is going to be extremely risky. If you think we can do this…” Steve trails off, appearing both unsure and afraid.

“Hey,” Tony says, his tone firm. He takes Steve’s hands into his own. “We’ll figure this out. We promised together, remember?”

Steve nods, the corners of his mouth tugging into a smile. “Yeah. Together.”

Tony presses a kiss to Steve’s forehead. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Steve says softly.

---

The Quinjet travels through the icy winds of Siberia, its engines humming steadily as it passes over an endless expanse of white. Inside, Tony grips the controls tightly, the tension palpable between the team. His mind drifts to Steve, hoping his husband is okay. Bruce and Helen were with him, taking turns to monitor both him and the baby. It didn’t seem like enough, but it was the only thing Tony could provide, at least until he found the serum. But even then, that too seemed like a false promise.

“This is a long shot,” Bucky mutters from his seat. “It’s been years since Hydra has operated in this area.”

“Understatement of the year,” Natasha quips from the co-pilot seat. She flips through an encrypted file on her Stark Pad. “The base we’re heading to was shut down decades ago. If

there's anything left, it's probably buried."

"Yeah, well we don't have a choice. Buck filled Steve's head with this crazy idea. I'm not coming back empty handed," Tony snaps.

Sam, leaning against the wall, crosses his arms over his chest and shoots Tony a look. "Hey, we get you're going through a lot, but this isn't the time to get snippy with us. We just want to help."

"I know." Tony sighs, the grip he has on the controls loosening slightly. "We can't let him down. He's back at home wasting away and I can't…I can't let him get worse. This needs to work."

"And it will," Sam says, his voice firm. "We find what we're looking for, but we do it smart. Steve wouldn't want us doing this job half assed."

Tony says nothing, his gaze straight ahead and locked on snowy expanse through the windshield as the jet touches down on a frozen plateau.

Then let's move," he finally says. "If there's anything left of that serum, it's ours."

---

Steve tosses and turns for most of the night, unable to find any rest. His body screams in protest for him to stay in bed, but his mind begs him to stay awake just in case something happened with the mission and his team needed him. Tony had assured him during his flight that the mission would be a success and for him not to worry, but that was easier said than done. Steve has led a majority of their missions, so it's difficult for him to remain behind while the team worked without him.

He sits up and waits in the control room for any new updates. If all had gone according to plan, then they should be on their way by now. His mind conjures up terrible and horrifying scenarios, some of them almost too much to handle.

"Come home Tony," Steve whispers to himself, his eyes squeezing shut as his emotions flood over him.

A gentle kick from his womb forces his eyes open and he glances down at himself, his lips tugging into a smile as he places his hand over his belly and feels another kick.

"Guess you're awake too, huh?" Steve rubs his belly and heaves out a sigh. "I could use the company. I miss your dad. He's doing something dangerous just for you and me. Get used to it, bud. That's how your dad is."

Steve continues to fondly rub his baby bump, feeling his heart flutter every time his son kicks and moves around.

"I hope he's okay," Steve murmurs more to himself than to the baby. "He's done some pretty scary things in the past. I wish I could be there with him, make sure he's okay."

Steve feels another kick, this one a little stronger, as if the baby is trying to tell him something. Steve chuckles softly. “Yeah, I know. I’ll calm down, okay?” Steve’s smile falters and he sighs. “I just worry. I can’t live without him.”

An alert from one of the monitors captures Steve’s attention and he snaps his head up, relief washing over him when he realizes the jet has returned and landing in the hangar.

Steve barely makes it down the hall when the sound of hurried footsteps and raised voices stops him in his tracks. His stomach drops when he notices a few medics rushing past with a stretcher. Sam is lying on it, his face covered in cuts and his suit torn and bloody.

Bucky appears next and immediately rushes after the medics. He’s a little bruised and banged up, but at least he’s standing upright.

“What happened?” Steve asks Bucky.

“The base wasn’t completely empty. They attacked us,” he replies.

“Where’s Nat? Tony? Buck, tell me they’re okay!”

“They’re fine. I have to go be with Sam. I’ll keep you updated,” Bucky says in a rush, then he quickly follows after Sam and the medics.

Steve watches Bucky disappear down the hall, his heart racing as he struggles to keep himself in check. The baby issues another strong kick, reminding Steve that the stress isn’t just affecting him anymore.

“I know, I know,” Steve mutters, placing one hand over his belly. “They’re fine. Buck said they’re fine. But where’s your dad?”

“Steve!” Tony’s voice grabs Steve’s attention and he spins around, finding Tony jogging toward him.

“Tony!” Relief floods Steve as he moves toward him, his eyes scanning Tony for any sign of injuries.

Tony stops in front of Steve and Steve immediately pulls him into his arms. “I’m here, I’m here,” Tony assures. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

“I’m just glad you’re okay. Is Nat fine?”

“Yeah, a little shaken up but fine. Sam got the worst of it.”

Steve pulls away. “I need to check on him. This never should’ve happened. Sending you out there—”

“We knew the risks. But…” Tony reaches into his pocket and pulls out a vial with a red liquid. “It was worth it.”

Steve eyes the serum warily, his gut twisting into knots. “I hope so.”

# Chapter 18

Steve grips Tony's hand tightly, his heart racing when he notices Helen approach with the syringe. He tries to distract himself with peaceful thoughts, but the only thing on his mind is his friends. Sam had immediately been rushed by the medics toward a room just down the hall from where Steve is. Bucky was with him, or at least he had been. Now Steve is wondering how his best friend is doing. And what about Natasha? Tony assured him she was okay, and yet Steve still finds himself concerned for her.

"Steve?" Helen's soft voice snaps his attention back to her. "We're ready when you are."

Steve takes a deep breath to gather himself, then he nods, giving her permission. He offers her his left arm, glancing at it and watching as she brings the needle closer to his flesh. He gasps and squeezes Tony's hand.

"Do you need me to stop?" Helen asks, looking at him with concern. She hadn't even inserted it yet and already Steve was freaking himself out. "I can wait a few minutes."

"We don't have a few minutes," Steve says firmly. "I can't waste anymore time. Just do it."

Helen nods with understanding, her hand steady. She speaks softly. "Okay, Steve. Deep breaths. Just focus on Tony."

Steve's grip on Tony's hand tightens further and Tony leans in close. "You got this, honey. I'm right here."

The needle pierces Steve's skin and he flinches in reaction. He can feel the serum entering his bloodstream. It's a hot sensation that travels through his arm. His breathing picks up and the fear he tried to hold back grips him tight.

"Breathe, honey," Tony tells him softly. "Almost there."

"It burns." Steve winces, doing his best not to yank his arm away from Helen. The burning intensifies, almost as if someone had lit a match and now a fire was traveling through his veins. He tries to breathe through it, reminding himself why he was doing this. Who he was doing it for. It wasn't about him anymore; this was all for his son.

"Almost there," Helen says, her usually calm voice wavering a bit. Steve wishes he didn't notice, and now he can't help but worry something was wrong. She looks over at Bruce, but he's too busy monitoring both Steve's and the baby's vitals.

Steve's breath hitches, his back arching off the table as the pain radiating through him worsens. He remembers feeling something similar back when he volunteered for Project Rebirth, but this time around is different–more intense and painful.

His chest tightens with each inhale as he attempts to calm himself. He's faced Hydra, fought off armies, and survived the impossible. But this feels different. He's not as strong as he used

to be, the serum that's meant to give him strength and durability is failing him, his body growing weaker and weaker every day. He needs this last trial to work. He needs his son to survive.

Steve screams, unable to mask his discomfort. Tony leans in close, whispering encouraging words into his ear. "Breathe, Steve. Hang in there."

The beeping from one of the monitors goes off, cutting through Steve's screams. Steve slumps back against the bed, craning his neck to glance in Bruce's direction. "Bruce?"

Bruce addresses Helen. "Steve's heart rate is increasing. He's under too much stress."

"Bruce?" Steve tries again, but he goes ignored.

"If he can hold on a little longer…" Helen directs her gaze on the screens, then down at the syringe. "Just a few more."

"No." Tony shakes his head. "Shut this down."

"No!" Steve screams. "Keep going. I can take it."

Helen looks at Tony, then to Steve. "If you're sure," she says, and when Steve nods, she administers the last of the serum.

Steve grits his teeth, his eyes filling with tears as the most excruciating pain he's ever felt wracks through him. He screams his voice raw, his vision blurring, the once clear images of his husband and friends fading in and out. The last thing he hears is Tony calling his name, then he gives into the darkness, allowing it to envelope him and put an end to the torture.

---

Hours later, Tony sits at Steve's bedside, his fingers intertwined with Steve's and his gaze locked on Steve's face. The room is quiet, except for the sounds of the soft beeping coming from the monitors Steve is hooked up to. Tony watches the screen broadcast data of Steve's heart rate, silently hoping his vitals don't change. He couldn't take seeing Steve suffer.

The door creaks open and Bruce appears in the doorway. "Just checking in. Is he still asleep?"

Tony nods. "Yeah."

"It was a lot for him today. Just give him some time to rest up."

"Do you think it worked?"

"Helen seems optimistic. The baby's doing well, so hopefully we continue to see them both in good health."

"I hope so. We don't have any other options. This has to work."

Bruce nods, acknowledging Tony's words. He steps further into the room, stopping at the other side of the bed. He glances over at the screen for a moment, then back to Tony. "And Strange? He can't do anything else?"

"He won't. There's nothing he can do. Or at least that's what he's telling me."

"I think Steve and the baby will be okay. Give his body a few days to adjust to the new serum and then we'll go from there."

Tony forces a smile, trying to come off positive. "Thanks, Bruce. I appreciate it."

Bruce nods, then he leaves the room to give Tony some time alone.

A few minutes later, Steve stirs, his relaxed state slowly ebbing away, his brows furrowing. Tony watches him closely, searching for any indication that he was in pain and needed assistance.

Steve's eyes open and he turns his head in Tony's direction. "Tony?" His voice is hoarse and raw.

"Hey." Tony smiles softly, feeling a sense of relief now that Steve is waking up. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired. My body hurts." Steve winces, then he glances down at himself. He places a hand over his belly, almost as if to assure himself that their son was still safe inside.

"He's okay," Tony answers the question that's going through Steve's mind. "Helen says he's doing good; you both are. You just need to take it easy for a while."

"I think I can do that. I need to slow down."

"Yes, you do." Tony glances down at their connected hands, his finger smoothing over the gold band on Steve's ring finger. "You scared me, honey. You were in a lot of pain."

"I'm used to it." Steve makes an attempt to sit up, only for his body to scream at him in protest, every muscle spasms until he's forced to lie back down.

"Take it easy," Tony says, "that's how you get through this. You and the baby need to rest."

"And Helen said he's okay?"

Tony nods.

Steve looks down at his belly and softly rubs the bump. "I hope he's okay. That was a lot."

"He's a strong kid. Just like you."

Steve huffs out a small laugh. "I can feel it."

“Is he moving?” Tony asks and he eagerly scoots closer. Steve nods and leads Tony’s hand to the spot where their son is currently stretching. Tony smiles when he feels his son’s foot press against his palm. “Our little Peter.”

Steve looks over at Tony, brows slightly furrowed. “Peter?”

“Huh?” Tony meets Steve’s eyes, for a moment forgetting what he had said, but then it registers. “Yeah, it’s a name I was thinking of. I don’t know. I wanted to run it by you instead of just blurting it out.”

“I like it.” Steve smiles. “Peter. It’s nice.”

“Better than Tony junior?”

“Way better.”

Tony shakes his head and laughs. “Wow. But I guess you’re right. I don’t want this kid to turn out like me. He better be all you.”

“Maybe a perfect mix of both.” Steve takes Tony’s hand in his and gives it a squeeze. The grip is strong.

“I think that serum is working. Helen is pretty optimistic about all this.”

“I hope it’s not temporary.” Steve lies his head back against the pillow and exhales. “I need this to work.”

“It will. I know it will.” Tony lifts his body out of the chair and leans over Steve, kissing the top of his head. “Get some rest. You and Peter need it.”

Steve smiles softly, his eyelids growing heavy. “I love you.”

Tony smiles back. “I love you more.”

# Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve knows damn well he should be in bed. Helen had made it clear that he needed to rest and take it easy despite her optimism about their newest trial. Steve had heard her loud and clear, but he needed to make sure his friends were okay.

The last update he had received was from Natasha. According to her Sam is doing better and stable, but also ordered to rest. He hadn't been released from the medbay yet, giving Steve a chance to visit him and make sure he's recovering.

Steve reaches Sam's private room and he knocks softly, then slowly opens the door. Sam is in bed, his eyes closed and his chest softly rising and falling. He looks better than the last time Steve had seen him. Steve had feared the worst when Sam had been been wheeled in covered in blood and barely hanging on. There's still a few cuts and bruises that need to heal, but otherwise he looks good.

Bucky is slouched in the chair beside the bed, his appearance is on the rough side. It's evident from the dark circles around his eyes that he hasn't been sleeping. He's asleep now, and Steve feels bad for disturbing him. But before he can leave, Bucky stirs and his eyes open, revealing how puffy they are.

"Hey," he greets, his voice raspy. "Sorry. I didn't mean to doze off."

"It's okay." Steve waves him off and steps further into the room, stopping beside Sam's bed. "I wanted to see how you two were doing."

"Doc says he's gonna be okay," Bucky says, his gaze drifting to Sam's face. He takes one of Sam's hands. "He's a pain in my ass but I love him. Our wedding is coming up and…" Bucky pauses, his breath shaky. "I'm just glad he's alive."

"Me,too." Steve agrees. "I'm sorry this happened. If you never went to that base then–"

"We had to," Bucky interrupts, meeting Steve's eyes now. "It was worth it. You're at least out of bed. I promise I was gonna come see you."

"Don't worry about it," Steve assures, and he pulls up a chair to sit down. "Helen feels good about this one. Maybe now I can finish this pregnancy without any more complications."

Bucky nods. "I hope so. I don't know how Hydra's serum will react. God forbid there's issues. I think you need a break."

"We all do. You have a wedding to prepare for. That should be the only thing you worry about."

Bucky huffs out a laugh. "Still need a tux."

Steve shakes his head disapprovingly. “I knew you didn’t have a damn suit.”

“No offense but that’s been the last thing on my mind.” Bucky grins and leans back in his chair. He releases a tired sigh. “Maybe now things will calm down, huh?”

“Maybe.” Steve nods.

Sam stirs, his brows furrowing as he softly grunts. His eyes slowly open, and he takes a moment to adjust before turning his head in Steve’s direction.

Steve smiles softly. “On your left.”

---

As the weeks pass, Steve finds that the serum is working well enough for him to continue his daily routine. Morning runs are cut short just to be on the safe side, but he’s pleased to see that he can at least run a lap or two. He’s eating better and getting a decent amount of sleep. The baby likes to keep him up some nights with hard kicks and punches, but Steve doesn’t mind. At least his son was healthy.

Helen and Bruce continue to monitor him and the baby to make sure that there’s no complications and the serum is acting like it should. Steve notices his strength returning, and pays extra attention to how intense that strength has become. He tries not to worry about it, wanting to keep his stress levels low for both his and the baby’s sake.

It’s late, sometime after two in the morning, but Steve’s stopped looking at the time somewhere after midnight. He knows he should be in bed and resting like Helen ordered, but with his due date getting closer each day, he decides to spend some time working on the nursery. Natasha and Bucky had already come by earlier to help clean out the room designated for the nursery, and they promised they’d help assemble the furniture Steve has gotten so far. But he didn’t want to bother them, and since he’s unable to sleep, he figured he could put together his son’s room.

Steve groans and pauses his work, the pain in his lower back forcing him to take a break. He reaches behind himself and digs his finger into the spot that aches, but he finds that it barely offers any relief. With a grunt, he pulls himself to his feet, one hand resting over his belly to help support himself.

Peter decides to wake from his slumber, issuing a rather hard kick to Steve’s delicate organs. “Hey, kiddo, easy on the kicking,” Steve says to his belly, remembering that his son can recognize his voice now.

Peter replies with a softer kick and Steve smiles. “Better.”

Steve looks around the room, frowning to himself when he discovers the state he’s left it in. Baby clothes are piled on the rocking chair, desperately needing to be washed and folded. He could start a load now, but with the dresser not ordered, he has no place to put them. It’s tempting to start building the crib and throw everything in there.

“I could get started on it,” he says to himself as he studies the large box leaning against the wall.

“Who are you talking to?”

Steve looks up, startled, then he relaxes when he notices Tony standing in the doorway, looking both tired and annoyed.

“Myself. And Pete. Mostly Pete. What are you doing up?” Steve asks.

“I was going to ask the same thing.” Tony makes his way into the nursery. “Go to bed, honey. This stuff can wait.”

“I know, I know. I just haven’t felt like this in a while and I wanted to get this done.”

“I think you have plenty of time. The serum seems to be working.”

“Yeah.” Steve nods, a small smile breaking across his face. “I’m feeling better. Finally something is going right.”

“I just hope it lasts,” Tony says, but there’s something about his tone Steve doesn’t like. It almost sounds like he’s worried, like he’s holding back something.

Steve furrows his brows. “What’s going on?”

“Hmm? Nothing.”

“Tony, I know you. What’s going on in that overly large brain of yours.” Steve tries to joke, hoping some light teasing would shift his husband’s mood, but Tony doesn’t laugh. He doesn’t even smile.

“I think you’re doing too much. You’re still running in the mornings and showing up for briefings. Now you’re in here trying to build the fucking nursery when I told you I’d handle it.”

Steve sighs. “I can’t take being tied down to a bed all day. I’m not pushing myself. I know my limits.”

“Listen, I’m glad we found a solution and you can do all the things you used to do, but how do we know this is permanent? For all we know you’re blowing through this new serum doing stupid shit like this and when you really need it won’t be there.”

“What is your problem? Nothing bad is going to happen.”

Tony scoffs and runs his fingers through his hair. He turns to walk away, muttering something under his breath.

“What did you say?” Steve demands.

Tony spins around. “I can’t do this! You promised you’d take it easy and you’re not! This needs to work, Steve!”

“You don’t think I know that? I feel fine, Tony. I’ve never felt better!”

“But for how long! God da—Steve, please! I’m begging here. Just rest. Please.”

“I get it,” Steve says, finally understanding what Tony is trying to say to him. “You don’t think I can do this. You never thought I could.”

“What?”

“That’s why you were so eager for me to get rid of the baby, right?”

“What the hell are you talking about! I wanted this baby! Who’s the one who didn’t want to give up when you did!”

“Don’t. Just don’t.” Steve shakes his head, stepping away to put some distance between them. He doesn’t want to fight. Not now. Not when things are looking up.

“So now you’re going to shut me out? We’re supposed to be a team here!” Tony shouts. The harshness of his tone has Steve’s blood boiling.

Steve walks over to the rocking chair, hoping to distract himself with the clothes that need attention, but Tony won’t let him be. He won’t let him calm down. He just needs a minute.

“Leave me alone. I need to…to think,” Steve says, trying to keep his voice light.

“This is what I’m talking about. You’re getting worked up.”

“Because of you!” Steve snaps, turning around to face Tony. “You’re the one who came in here and attacked me. I was doing just fine! If you’d just leave me alone then I’d be fine!”

“You want me to leave you alone? Is that it?”

The anger boils hot in his veins, threatening to overflow at any second. Steve’s chest heaves as he tries to regain the fury rising in him, his hands trembling at his sides. His face burns with frustration, his words coming out quicker than he can control.

“Yes, Tony! I just want to be left alone! Every time I try to do something you’re always there hovering, telling me I’m doing it wrong or I’m too tired or pushing myself too hard. But you don’t get it! I need to do this. I need to feel like I’m still in control of something.”

“That’s not what this is about,” Tony says, his voice steady but tight. “This is about you taking care of yourself. You’re not fine—don’t you get that? You’re not capable of doing this.”

In a fit of rage, Steve grabs the rocking chair and throws it against the wall, pieces of wood shattering. Steve stands there, his breathing heavy and fists clenched tightly at his side. His whole body trembles with the intensity of his emotions.

Tony freezes, his eyes wide with shock, as the broken pieces of the rocking chair lay scattered on the floor. The room feels heavy with the aftermath of Steve's outburst, the tension thick between them.

"I'm sorry," Steve mutters, his voice raw and shaky. "I don't know what the hell is wrong with me."

Tony doesn't say anything for a moment, unsure if it's okay for him to move. He studies Steve's face, searching for something—understanding, reassurance, anything. Then, slowly, he takes a few steps forward.

"Tony?" Steve whispers, then the moment Tony wraps his arms around him, he breaks down. "I'm sorry. This isn't me. I'm so sorry."

"Hey, it's okay. It's my fault. I didn't mean to upset you. I just worry," Tony says, his tone more soothing than it had been before.

"I didn't—I promise I didn't mean it. I just…I don't know what happened."

"You Hulked out. Happens to the best of us."

Steve says nothing, unsure of what he can say to make it better. He doesn't want to believe the serum had anything to do with his outburst, but deep down he knows it's changing him.

Chapter End Notes

I can definitely see where they're both coming from. Tony is terrified of losing Steve because of what Strange had said and Steve is tired of feeling like he's not capable of having the baby. His whole life he's been made to feel like he couldn't do anything. What a mess for these two 🤦‍♀️

I wonder what else the serum is gonna do 😈

Thanks for reading!

# Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"This looks nice," Natasha says, holding up a black tuxedo with a smooth sheen.

Steve looks over at her then to the tux. "I have mine picked out. I just need to see if it still fits." He gently pats his belly, smiling when he feels his son start to stir.

Natasha can tell immediately that the baby is awake, and she puts the tux back on the rack. "Let me feel." She places her hand over Steve's belly and he takes it, leading it to the spot where Peter is kicking. "He's so active. Hi, baby. It's your Auntie Nat. I'm going to be your favorite."

Steve chuckles. "Careful. I think Tony coined that word."

Natasha rolls her eyes. She leans in close to his belly. "Don't listen to your papa. I'm the favorite, understand?"

Steve shakes his head and smiles.

Bucky steps out from the dressing room and onto the platform, dressed in a sleek modest tux. Natasha gasps and grips Steve's arm excitedly. Steve's face lights up at the sight of his best friend. He couldn't believe that Bucky was getting married.

Bucky catches the look on Steve's face and he frowns. "What's wrong? Is it too much? I look ridiculous, don't I? I was going for something simple."

Natasha leans in close to Steve. "I think he's freaking out."

Steve nods, then he walks over to the platform and steps onto it. "You look great, Buck. Honest."

"You'd tell me the truth, right?" Bucky asks, still frowning.

"Always. I know Sam's going to love it."

Bucky's shoulders sag instantly and he breathes out a small sigh. "Okay good." He turns to look at himself in the full-length mirror. "I guess it's not too bad."

"You look great." Steve smiles, their eyes meeting in the mirror.

Bucky smiles back and turns around. "This is crazy. I'm getting married."

"A good crazy, right?"

"Yeah, a good crazy. I wish my ma was here to see this. You know she would've loved him."

Steve nods. “She would have. We can save her a seat. One for your father and sister too.”

Bucky swallows hard, his eyes filling with tears. Steve comes closer and lays a hand over Bucky’s shoulder. Bucky turns around, wrapping his arms around Steve and holding him tight.

“It’s gonna be okay,” Steve says softly.

Bucky sniffs but says nothing, just continues to hold onto Steve, finding comfort in him just like he’s always had.

“Thanks, Pal. I’m glad you’re here. I couldn’t do this with you,” Bucky says.

Natasha clears her throat loudly and they immediately pull apart and look over at her. “You two weren’t supposed to make me teary-eyed over a damn suit.”

Steve chuckles. “Sorry. We’ll save the sappy stuff for the big day. I’m sure my speech will have you sobbing.”

Natasha rolls her eyes and grins. “We’ll see. I do hope you throw in some embarrassing stories about Barnes.”

“It’s Steve’s turn,” Bucky quickly changes the conversation.

A few minutes later, Steve steps back onto the platform, dressed in the tux he had picked out months ago. He studies himself in the mirror and straightens the front of the suit jacket. It barely stretches over his belly, but that doesn’t appear too concerning and nothing a little altering can’t fix if he has another growth spurt in the next few weeks. He does notice how loose the pants feel around his waist.

“You look amazing!” Natasha gushes. “Do a little twirl.”

Steve turns around to face his friends. “Does this look off to you?”

“What do you mean?” Bucky asks, leaning forward in his seat. “You look great!”

“No, I mean…” Steve turns back to check out his reflection. “The suit doesn’t fit anymore.”

“Baby probably grew some more,” Natasha says.

But Steve shakes his head. “That’s not it. It doesn’t fit everywhere else.”

Bucky and Natasha share a look, then they both walk onto the platform. Natasha studies the suit, adjusting the jacket and trying to button it closed.

“The pants are loose. Even my arms…” Steve lifts up his arms to show how the suit hangs off awkwardly.

“I can have them alter it,” Bucky says.

“You might need another one anyway,” Natasha adds. “You’ll be what, twenty-eight weeks by the wedding?”

“Yeah.” Steve nods his head and continues to frown. “I thought I’d need a little altering because it’s too tight. Now it’s too loose.”

“Is that normal?” Bucky asks.

“I don’t know,” Steve replies.

“Don’t worry about it,” Natasha assures. “I’m sure everything is okay.”

Steve says nothing, but he hopes she’s right.

---

Tony lounges in his chair, casually dressed in a button down shirt and aviator sunglasses despite being indoors. Rhodey sits across from him, dressed in a military style jacket and looking a little more serious. The atmosphere is comfortable but charged with an unspoken history only best friends can share.

Tony fiddles with his phone, his mind clearly elsewhere, while Rhodey sips on his drink.

“Seriously, Tony, do you ever take a break?” Rhodey asks, eyeing his friend from the rim of his glass.

“I am taking a break,” Tony replies, not even looking away from his phone. “Just checking up on Steve. He’s out getting his tux or something.”

“The wedding is coming up. Crazy.” Rhodey shakes his head and takes another sip of his drink. “Remember how nervous you were about marrying Steve?”

Tony looks up at him. “Yes. Please don’t remind me.”

“I think I will.”

“No. Yes, I was nervous, but at least I went through with it.”

Rhodey chuckles. “You almost chickened out.”

“Key word is almost. I was drunk! But now look at us—happily married and having a baby,” Tony says.

“How’s that going by the way?” Rhodey asks, his tone serious.

Tony sighs and sets his phone down. “I don’t know. He took that new serum and…I think it changed him.”

“What do you mean?” Rhodey frowns.

“He’s…he’s different. His mood swings are insane. And I know you’re going to say something about the pregnancy, but I don’t think that’s it. He threw a chair at me—”

“He threw a chair at you?”

“It was nothing.”

“Tones, this doesn’t sound like nothing.”

“I’m just saying I think this new serum has made him more irritable or something. He’s stronger too. I’m glad it’s working but…”

“And the baby? How’s he doing?”

Tony fiddles with his fork. “Fine. Helen says he’s doing good. It’s just Steve I’m worried about.”

Rhodey sighs. “Damn. If it’s bothering you this much you should talk to him. Maybe this serum isn’t working the way you think. What kind is it anyway?”

“Hydra. I stole it from one of their bases.”

Rhodey slants back in his seat. “Jesus, Tony.”

“I had to,” Tony says firmly. “Nothing else was working. I can’t lose him or the baby. I can’t.”

Rhodey gives him a hard look, but his voice softens. “I get it. I know you’d do anything for them. But messing with Hydra stuff? That’s dangerous.”

Tony’s hand curls around his fork, the tension in his shoulder’s unmistakable. “I didn’t have a choice.”

“So what’s the plan? You can’t keep playing with fire like this.”

Tony’s gaze flickers to the side, lost in thought. “I don’t know yet.”

The sound of his phone buzzing captures his attention and he immediately grabs it, his heart rate rising when he sees the messages from Natasha.

“I have to go.” Tony immediately jumps to his feet and tosses a few bills onto the table. Rhodey stands up.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s Steve. I promise I’ll make this up to you. Maybe next week or—”

“Don’t worry about it. Just get out of here.”

Tony nods and pats Rhodey on the shoulder, then he rushes out of the restaurant.

Chapter End Notes

I know I’m updating this one again but I just want to focus on this one and my other fic baby blues and I love yous for a while. I’m stuck on my other fics at the moment 😣

Anyway! Thank you guys so much for reading! I’ll update soon! Things are gonna get more angsty and whumpy 😈

# Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

> Hi! So I was in the ER for a cough and had some time to write. What else am I gonna do you know? This chapter is angsty so heads up but I'm sure a lot of you are here for that 😜

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony quietly knocks on the door to Steve's private room, then he opens it, his heart sinking at the sight of his husband lying in the medical bed. He has an IV line running through his arm while another machine monitors his vitals. Natasha is sitting on one side while Bucky is on the other, both of them wearing looks of concern on their faces. Steve notices Tony standing in the doorway and he smiles weakly.

"Hey," he says, and just hearing him speak sends a wave of relief washing over Tony.

"Hey, baby." Tony steps further into the room and shuts the door behind him, then he walks over to Steve and takes his hand, trying not to frown at the bruise where the needle has punctured his skin. "What happened?"

"Almost fainted," Steve replies. "I just got a little dizzy."

"I think it's more than that," Natasha says. "Tell him, Steve."

Tony's eyes shoot to her, then back to Steve. "Tell me what? What happened?"

Steve sighs. "My suit didn't fit."

"Okay? Like it's too small or…"

"Too big," Bucky replies. "Helen said she wanted to check his weight and maybe do a test."

"Shit." Tony curses. "Okay. I guess it's for the best. Need to know what's going on and make sure you and Junior are okay."

Steve smiles softly. "He was moving earlier. He's getting so strong."

Tony forces a smile, trying to act happy, but deep down he fears their son is getting stronger and Steve is not.

"That's great, honey. Guess we got a mini you, huh?"

Steve chuckles. "Yeah."

A knock on the door interrupts and Helen enters the room with Bruce. “Tony, I’m glad you’re here. He was asking for you.”

“Yeah, I got here as soon as I could. You wanted to do some tests?” Tony asks.

Helen nods. “If your friends don’t mind…”

Natasha gets up and gestures for Bucky to do the same. They say their goodbyes and promise to check in later, then they leave the room.

“Do we need to do tests?” Steve asks, looking between Helen and Bruce. “I’m feeling fine now.”

“Steve, you’re dehydrated which is why we needed to put in an IV. But what concerns me is the sudden weight loss,” Helen says.

“We think it could be the other serum,” Bruce explains. “We just want to run a few tests to make sure.”

Steve heaves out a sigh and gently throws his head back against the pillow. “If you think that’s the best thing to do.”

“Give us a few minutes and we’ll get started,” Helen says, then she leaves the room with Bruce.

“It’s gonna be okay,” Tony assures, gently taking Steve’s hand. “I’m sure everything is fine.”

Steve turns his head to face Tony. “You’re always so positive. Sometimes I wish I could be more like you. I worry about this kid all the time.”

“Yeah? I do too. I worry about both of you. I just want this to go smoothly. I’ll never stop fighting for you, honey.”

Steve smiles, but it’s weak and at first Tony assumes it’s because Steve is tired, but deep down he wonders if there’s an underlying issue. He doesn’t want to believe that the new serum was failing. They didn’t have any more options.

---

Helen and Bruce return later with the results. Steve has dozed off, his body too drained to stay alert any longer. A part of Tony doesn’t want to disturb him and wish he could just speak to their friends alone, but he knows Steve will want to hear the update from them.

“Honey.” Tony gently shakes Steve awake. “Hey, sweetheart. The results are in.”

Steve nods his head slowly and tries to sit up, only to slant back into the bed. He directs his attention on Bruce and then to Helen, a frown appearing over his face.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

Helen and Bruce exchange a brief glance before Helen speaks. “The Hydra serum isn’t working. It’s making things more…complicated.”

“Complicated how?” Steve’s voice is hoarse and his body trembles slightly. Tony tries to adjust the blanket around him, but Steve gently pushes him away. “Just tell me.”

“Steve,” Bruce begins, his voice laced with concern. “The baby is absorbing both the Hydra serum and your Super Soldier serum.”

Tony’s eyes go wide, his heart dropping in his chest. “What do you mean absorbing?”

“We think the pregnancy is reacting to the foreign agents in your body in an unexpected way,” Helen replies. “The baby isn’t just developing—he’s actively drawing from both serums, trying to stabilize himself or…gain power.”

Steve faces contorts into fear and he grips the sheets tightly. “So he’s…getting stronger than me.”

“Yes,” Bruce says. “The combined effect is weakening you. It’s destabilizing your physiology. It appears that your body is reverting back to its pre-serum state. The enhancements that once made you strong are fading.”

“No.” Tony shakes his head and he grabs Steve’s hand. “No he’s not…”

“Tony,” Steve whispers, forcing Tony to look at him. “They’re right. I can feel it happening.”

“No. We have to fix it. We *can* fix it.” Tony cups Steve’s face gently, trying to stay strong despite the panic clawing at his chest. “You’re not just the serum. You’re stronger than this.”

Helen steps closer, her voice soft but full of determination. “We might have a few options left, Tony, but none of them are easy. We can attempt to isolate the serums, one at a time from his body, but it would be risky. The baby might not survive that.”

“No,” Steve says firmly. “If it means my son may lose his life then I’m not doing it. I don’t care if he’s getting stronger—”

“Steve—” Tony tries to interrupt but Steve ignores him.

“No. Don’t touch my baby. You’re only allowed to monitor him from now on. No more trials and tests. I’m weeks away from giving birth and I won’t put my son’s life at risk anymore.”

“But what about your life!” Tony snaps. “Tell him,” he says to Bruce and Helen. “Tell him how he’s dying.”

Steve stares hard at his lap. “I don’t care.”

“I’m sorry, you don’t care? You should care! Your life is at risk!” Tony yells, that panic he had been feeling replaced by anger.

“Then I die.” Steve finally looks at him, his tone firm. “Peter’s life is more important.”

“Steve,” Helen says and he looks at her. “Tony’s right. Your life is at risk right now. If we can attempt to save you—”

“I said no. Now leave.”

Bruce opens his mouth as if to say more but Steve shakes his head and he sighs. “If you need anything, we’ll be here.”

They leave the room.

“You’re being ridiculous.” Tony practically snarls. They’re trying to help you!”

“And by doing so we risk losing Peter? No, Tony. I’m not doing this anymore. I’ve suffered long enough with these tests because you thought it would work, but it didn’t. I’m tired. I can’t keep doing this. Let me enjoy the rest of this pregnancy.”

“You’re not going to! Don’t you get it! You’re going to get sicker and then…” Tony releases a shaky breath, his eyes growing misty with tears.

“Peter comes first. Promise me that,” Steve says.

Tony shakes his head and rises to his feet, heading toward the door.

“Tony!”

“No!” Tony spins around. “Don’t make me choose something like that!”

“You said we’d do this together.”

“You’ll die.”

“If that’s what it takes—”

Tony leaves the room and slams the door hard on his way out. He walks across the hall, cupping his mouth to hold back the sob that tries to escape. His eyes burn with tears and he finally allows a couple to roll down his cheeks. His hands tremble, the weight of everything crashing down around him feels unbearable.

He chokes back a sob and slides down to the floor, unable to keep it together. He couldn’t sit around and let Steve suffer. Something had to be done. The vision Strange has can’t come to pass.

Chapter End Notes

Time for some more drama! Get ready because it’s all angst and whump for our boys from here on out!

# Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony stares up at the ceiling, his mind racing with what feels like a million thoughts. He hasn't been able to get rid of his worries or talk about the possibility of losing Steve. Whenever he tries to talk to him about how dangerous their situation is, Steve shuts him out, claiming he doesn't want to hear it and for them to focus on the positive. But it's hard to do that when every day Steve deteriorates.

He's lost more weight since Helen and Bruce broke the horrible news. He barely eats anymore, making him weaker and forced to lie down. Sometimes Tony will find him on the couch for hours, his body too frail to move up to the bedroom. Despite Steve withering away before his eyes, their son thrives, continuing to kick and roll around, sometimes hurting Steve in the process.

It was all too much to handle and Tony didn't know how he was supposed to deal with this for twelve more weeks. If Steve even made it that long.

Tony snaps his head in Steve's direction when the sound of Steve wheezing captures his attention. Just like Bruce had said, Steve was reverting back to his pre-serum state, which meant his asthma had returned. Steve assured Tony he could survive through it, but something seemed off, and Tony hated waking up almost every night to Steve not being able to breathe.

Knowing Steve could need assistance, Tony sits up, ready to intervene if he needs to. He even has JARVIS monitoring both Steve and the baby, and ready on standby in case of an emergency.

Tony watches as Steve shifts in the bed, his hands clutching at the sheets as he tries to steady his breathing. The wheezing is sharp, but a sound Tony has grown familiar with. It's not until Steve starts to gasp for air does Tony jump into action.

"Honey, hey, breathe. I need you to breathe with me, okay?"

Steve blinks up at him, sweat clinging to his forehead, his lips slightly parted as he struggles to get air into his lungs.

"Tony." Steve rasps, the hitch in his chest more noticeable now. He claws at Tony's arm, his eyes widening.

"Breathe, Steve. You're gonna be okay," Tony assures.

He gestures subtly and JARVIS broadcasts Steve's vitals in the air. Steve's heart rate is increasing and his oxygen levels drop. Trying to remain calm, Tony grabs the inhaler and brings it to Steve's lips. He gently cradles the back of his head as he supports him upright.

“Here. Deep breath, baby. Just one slow, steady inhale.”

Steve tries, his shoulders shaking as he pulls in the medicine, the sound of the wheeze peaking, then slowly beginning to fade. His eyes flutter shut, and Tony keeps his arms around him, quietly counting down.

“That’s it. You’re going so good.” Tony presses a kiss to Steve’s temple.

“Peter?” Steve asks, his voice still raspy.

“Baby’s okay.” Tony’s eyes flicker to the other set of vitals. A pang of guilt hits him for hating the fact that their son is fine and Steve is not.

Steve nods, then slumps back, his eyes falling shut. His breathing starts to ease, but Tony refuses to move. He stays by Steve’s side, watching him closely until Steve looks at him with tear-filled eyes.

“I got you,” Tony whispers. “Always.”

Steve smiles, but it’s weak. “Thank you. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You’re not sleeping because of me. I know this is taking a toll on you.”

Tony scoffs and looks away for a second, then reconnects his eyes with Steve’s. “Don’t act like it’s not doing the same to you. You’re getting hit harder and it’s not fair.”

Steve reaches for Tony’s hand. “Just a few more weeks.”

“That’s a long time.”

Tony doesn’t dare say how he fears Steve won’t make it. They’re not promised tomorrow, but with Steve’s body failing, Tony fears he could lose Steve at any second. And it terrifies him to death.

“Lie down with me,” Steve encourages. “We have a big day.”

Tony heaves out a sigh but takes his original position by Steve. Steve moves closer, trying to curl up against Tony’s side, but with his belly in the way, he can’t get very close.

“I think we should skip the wedding,” Tony says, as he gently runs his fingers through Steve’s damp hair.

“I can’t. My best friend is getting married. He was there for ours,” Steve says.

“I think they’ll understand. Everyone is worried about you, Cap.”

“I know.”

“Just promise you’ll take it easy. If you need to sit down I can get you a wheelchair or—”

“I’ll be okay.” Steve cuts him off.

They lay in silence for a few minutes, then Steve grabs Tony’s hand and places it over his belly. “He’s moving.”

Tony feels a tiny foot jab against his palm. This happens a few times, then Peter must shift position, and judging by the way Steve gasps, it’s uncomfortable.

“Honey?”

“It’s okay. He’s just…he’s strong.”

Tony squeezes his eyes shut, not wanting Steve to see how scared he is. The conversation he had with Strange flashes in his mind. Steve’s going to die, that’s what he had said. Their son was going to be strong, too strong for them.

“Steve?”

“Hmm?” Steve acknowledges him with a soft hum. He sounds tired.

“Nothing. Just promise me you’ll keep fighting. I can’t lose you.”

“You won’t. I can do this all day, remember?”

A single tear rolls down Tony’s face. “Yeah.”

Tony holds Steve the rest of the night, too afraid of letting go for even a second and risking losing him. His hand still rests over Steve’s belly, feeling every roll and kick Peter produces.

“Please, kiddo. Take it easy on him. Please,” Tony whispers into the dark.

Chapter End Notes

Since I’m sick I can rest and maybe do some writing. I’m really getting into this story again!

Ready for the SamBucky wedding? 😈

# Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

> Hey yall! Sorry it's been a minute. I'm battling a lung infection and still job hunting. It's been rough! But I wanted to do some writing and see if I could finish this story soon ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ceremony is less than two hours away. Steve spent most of the morning building up his strength to assure that he was well enough for his friends' big day. He never thought he'd get the chance to see them stand at the altar and proclaim their love in front of all their friends. For a while Steve thought he'd never see his best friend again, but miraculously Bucky was brought back to him, allowing them to continue their friendship.

But now Steve wonders if he'll get to see what happens next for his friends. Would he be there when they celebrate one year of marriage? Or when they decide they want to have children? He hopes he can be around for those late nights when Sam and Bucky are fighting and Steve needs to remind them why they fell in love in the first place. There's so much he wants to be around for, and yet he fears he doesn't have much time left.

He won't get to be there for his friends or his family. His son was going to grow up without him. Steve would never see Peter smile for the first time or take his first steps. He'll never get to hear Peter's first word or be there for his first day of school. Peter would have to learn how to live without him, and just thinking about everything regarding his son has Steve shedding a tear.

Steve inhales, only for the breath to come out shaky. His inhaler is in the front pocket of his suit in case he needs it. He prays he doesn't. Today needs to be perfect. This might be the last time he gets to be surrounded by everyone he loves.

When the breathing exercises he's been practicing don't calm him down, he immediately sits down, leaning forward and cradling his head. He can feel Peter start to stir, something he's been dreading lately.

The movement his son produces is too much at times, sometimes too unbearable it leaves Steve gasping in pain. He's tried to hide the discomfort from Tony, but his husband can see right through him, and though Tony hasn't addressed it, Steve knows he will when he's had enough.

"Please, kiddo," Steve begs, fondly rubbing his belly. "Not now."

But Peter continues his assault on Steve's womb, kicking so hard Steve groans in pain. He knows his son doesn't mean it. There's not a lot of space in there and he's sure his son is getting uncomfortable, but they only had to survive twelve more weeks.

Survive. That's all they had to do. It was easier said than done, and maybe at one point Steve believed he could come out of this alive. But now he's not so sure.

It's too hard to hold everything in; he's been doing it for so long, not wanting to show Tony how scared and unsure he really is about their situation. Knowing there's a good chance he won't make it scares him to death. He can handle dying, but knowing he'll be leaving Tony and their son is too much to bear.

A small sob escapes him and he covers his face with his hands. He lets it all hit him now that he's alone and able to feel it. The tears run freely now that he doesn't have to conceal them.

A knock on the door startles him and he snaps his head up, relaxing slightly when he finds Bucky on the other side.

"Hey, Pal, sorry I'm just—are you okay?"

Steve nods and quickly wipes his eyes. "Yeah, I'm good. What's wrong? You're supposed to be walking down the aisle soon."

"I know." Bucky shuts the door, then makes his way over to Steve and sits down beside him. "Why are you hiding in here?" Bucky softly nudges Steve with his elbow. "You look good by the way. Minus the crying. What's going on?"

"Nothing," Steve replies and turns away, but Bucky knows him too damn well, and once he feels Bucky's hand on his shoulder, he allows Bucky in. With a shuddering breath, he turns toward his friend, revealing the tears in his eyes. "I'm scared, Buck."

"Of what?" Bucky frowns, now clearly concerned.

"If I don't make it…I can't leave him. I love him and I can't—"

"Hey, come here." Bucky wraps his arms around Steve and pulls him close. "Don't talk like that. You're going to get out of this. I know you will."

Steve clings to Bucky tightly, seeking the comfort only his friend can offer. "I don't want to die, Buck."

"You're not." Bucky's own voice is laced with emotion. "Don't think that way. You're not going to die, do you hear me? You're not."

Steve nods, doing his best to believe every word, but it's too difficult. He would just have to keep fighting and not give up, not when he's made it this far. He had to keep going for his son. For Tony.

They eventually pull apart and Bucky reaches into his jacket pocket, retrieving a handkerchief. "Here. I'd hate for you to go out looking like this."

Steve huffs out a laugh and accepts the handkerchief. He frowns. "Buck, isn't this your father's?"

“Yeah, it’s my something borrowed. I’m sure he won’t mind.”

Steve shakes his head and hands it back to Bucky. “I can’t take this.”

“You sure?” Bucky hesitatingly takes the cloth back.

“Yeah. I want this day to be perfect. Can’t have my snot all over that.”

Bucky chuckles and shakes his head. He tucks the handkerchief back into his pocket. “You ready to go back out there?”

“Are you? Something tells me you came in here to hide.”

“Kinda. I’m getting cold feet.”

“Buck…”

Bucky shakes his head and takes a step back. “I’m fine. I’m just nervous as hell. I love him. God I love him so much and—”

“And what?” Steve presses for more, rising to his feet in case he needs to offer comfort of his own.

“I’m scared I’m not enough. I’m still a—”

“Don’t,” Steve cuts him off, his voice firm. “You’re not. You’re Bucky Barnes. Hydra and all of that is the past, and you can’t let that define you. Sam loves you despite everything. You have to believe that, Buck.”

Bucky takes a shaky breath, his eyes growing bright with tears. He runs a hand through his neatly styled hair. “Yeah. I know, Steve, I know. Some days it’s just hard and I wonder why he even loves me.”

“The same way I love you. The same way everyone loves you. No one is judging you for your past.”

Bucky takes another breath and slowly releases it. “Sorry. I guess I’ve been feeling this way for months and just haven’t been able to talk about it.”

“Hey,” Steve says softly and Bucky looks at him. “You could’ve talked to me. I’m always here.”

“I know. I just didn’t want to put more stress on you. You’re dealing with enough as it is.”

“It doesn't matter. I’ll always be there.”

*Will you?*

Steve tunes the voice out.

“Thanks, Pal.” Bucky smiles, appearing calmer now. “I think I’m okay now. Are you?”

“Yeah.” Steve forces a smile. “Never better.”

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The sun is beginning to set, casting golden light over the Hudson and painting the compound grounds in soft oranges and pinks. The lawn had been transformed with string lights, glowing lanterns swaying in the trees and long tables dressed in burgundy and navy. The air is warm and breezy, scented with the aroma of summer flowers and roasted food from the grills.

Bucky and Sam enter a few minutes later, hand in hand and grinning from ear to ear. Everyone bursts into applause, some cheer, a very loud whoop from Rhody and Tony.

The DJ switches from soft jazz to the song chosen for their first dance. Steve watches from his table, smiling as his two best friends sway to the music. It takes him back to his wedding night and how magical that had been. He just knows they’re feeling the same way he had.

Tony leans in and says softly, “They’re a great pair, huh?”

Steve smiles and nods. “The greatest.”

After a few more rounds of dancing, the speeches begin. Sarah Wilson goes first, rising from her seat and giving a speech that is both reminiscent and playful. She threatens Bucky not to break her brother’s heart, earning a nod from Bucky and a few laughs from the crowd.

When it’s Steve’s turn, Tony helps him stand, making sure he’s steady enough. Steve appreciates the help, but feels guilty for how dependent he’s become on Tony.

“I never imagined this,” Steve says, his voice a little rough. “But I can’t think of anyone more deserving of each other. You both have carried more than most, fought harder than most. And now you get to rest. Together. I’m so incredibly happy for you both and wish you many years of happiness.”

Steve and Bucky share a smile, and Steve notices the tears in his friend’s eyes.

More dancing follows. Steve sits by himself, watching his friends and husband dance, a part of him aching to join them. Tony has tried asking him to dance a few times, making sure Steve was okay to do so, but Steve turned him down, not wanting to push himself.

A slower song plays, something vintage and romantic. It’s his first dance song.

Tony realizes immediately and he turns to Steve and they share a smile. Tony makes his way over and holds out his hand. “Care to dance?”

Steve smiles and gingerly accepts the invitation. Tony pulls him in close and they sway softly to the music.

“Remember when we danced to this?” Tony asks.

Steve hums. “How could I forget? Best night of my life.”

“Mine too. I’m so glad you said yes by the way.”

Steve chuckles. “If I said no we wouldn’t be here,” he says, leading Tony’s hand away from his waist and toward his protruding middle.

“Is the kiddo awake?” Tony asks.

“I’m sure the cake will wake him.”

“That cake looks delicious.”

Steve leans a little closer, resting his head on Tony’s shoulder as they sway to the song. Tony’s hands return to his waist, his hold a little harder, a promise to keep Steve upright just in case. Steve tries not to think about how much his body has drastically changed. He’s thinner now, especially around his hips and ribs. Tony hasn’t said anything, but Steve knows he worries. He knows that’s why Tony is holding him so close.

The song is close to ending when Steve feels their son stir. It starts off as a few light kicks, then they become stronger, more intense. Steve cries out from one particular hard kick, and he doubles over.

“Honey?” Tony’s voice is laced with panic. He’s not the only one concerned; the rest of the crowd has noticed.

Steve tries to say something, anything, but all that comes out is a scream when the hard kicks from his son persists. He crumbles in Tony’s arms, thankful Tony is there to catch him before he hits the ground. Everyone crowds around him: Bucky is asking him if he's okay; Natasha is calling for help; Bruce is trying to figure out what’s wrong.

Steve meets Tony’s gaze and he catches the worry that flashes across his face. He tries to offer some kind of reassurance, but he can’t. He doesn’t think he can do it anymore.

Chapter End Notes

If you know me then you know this chapter wasn’t gonna be completely happy 😂 Poor Steve is in for it!

# Chapter 24

The first thing Steve becomes aware of is the soft beeping. His nose gets a whiff of antiseptic, the sterile scent sharp and cold in his lungs. His eyelids feel heavy, but he forces them open, squinting against the harsh fluorescent light overhead.

The world slowly begins to focus. He can feel the stiff sheets around him and the IV taped to his arm. He's in the medical wing. He knows it before his brain can even think of the place.

His body aches in a deep, bone tired way. It's like he's been through a war and back again.

Someone shifts. A chair creaks. Steve turns his head slowly, ignoring the throbbing in his skull, and he sees Tony sitting close. His eyes are red-rimmed but bright with relief.

"Hey," Tony says softly, a smile forming over his face. He leans in closer, taking one of Steve's hands. "I'm glad you're awake. I was so worried."

Steve's brows furrow and he opens his mouth to speak, only for some of the words to get lost in his throat. "What…happened?"

"I don't know," Tony replies, scooting closer to Steve. "Helen thinks your blood pressure was too high. They want to run some tests."

"No." Steve shakes his head. He winces, regretting the decision to move when a sharp pain radiates through his skull. "No more tests. I can't risk Peter."

"I know. I told her that but…honey, we need to know what's going on."

Steve heaves out a sigh and turns away, his gaze settling on the ceiling. "I'm almost there, Tony. Just a few more weeks until he's born."

"And if you can't wait that long? What then?"

Steve says nothing, his jaw tight. He shuts his eyes, wishing he could fall back asleep and avoid this conversation. Avoid everything.

A soft knock on the door reaches his ears and he lifts his head. Helen and Bruce enter the room, their expressions tense. Steve sighs, already knowing that they didn't have good news. He prepares himself for the worst—it's all he can do.

"Sorry to interrupt," Helen says softly, her gaze flickering between Steve and Tony. "But we need to talk about your options."

Steve's throat tightens. "Options," he echoes, the word tasting bitter in his mouth.

Bruce steps forward, his arms folded, his voice calm but firm. "Steve, your body is under a lot of stress. The serum is doing everything it can to keep you stable but the pregnancy is pushing it to its limits."

“I can handle it,” Steve says quickly.

Helen sighs. “Right now, we’re looking at a possible early delivery. It’s not ideal, but if your vitals keep trending this way…”

Steve clenches his jaw. “You want to cut him out of me.”

“No way,” Tony says. “He’s not strong enough.”

“If we don’t do this soon he could get weaker and lower his chances of surviving the surgery,” Helen replies.

“You’re not cutting him out. He’s not ready.”

Tony flinches at the bitterness in Steve’s voice. “They’re just trying to make sure you both survive this. I don’t like it either but if it means you make it then we have to do it.”

“We’re monitoring Peter closely,” Bruce adds. “He’s strong. But you need to be, too.”

Steve turns his head, blinking up at the ceiling as if it holds all the answers to his problems. “Just a few more weeks.”

Tony reaches for Steve’s hand. “Maybe. But you might not have that long. And if it comes down to choosing between pushing forward or losing everything…” Tony’s voice trembles. “You know what we have to do.”

Steve yanks his hand away. “I’m choosing him. I’m waiting until he’s safe to be born. You’re not cutting him out of me.”

“Steve—” Bruce tries but Steve shakes his head. Bruce sighs and turns to Helen. “Bring him in. Maybe he can talk some sense into him.”

Steve tenses. “Who? Who did you call?”

His question goes ignored, but he doesn’t have to wait long for an answer. Helen opens the door and gestures for someone, then Strange appears. Tony jumps to his feet at the sight of him, his hands rolled into tight fists.

“What the hell is he doing here?” Tony grits out.

“We need his help,” Helen says. “We can’t do this on our own.”

“We don’t need him,” Tony nearly snarls. “He didn’t want to help us before.”

“Tony,” Bruce says, his voice calm. “The serums didn’t work.”

Strange frowns. “Serums? What are you talking about?”

Helen looks to Bruce and they share a look, then she glances at Strange. “We administered a serum created by Hydra to help stabilize Steve. The super soldier serum was failing and we

needed something to compensate."

Strange's face darkens. "You injected him with Hydra serum? Without understanding the full consequences?"

Tony throws his hands up. "We didn't exactly have time for a peer-reviewed study! You didn't want to help us! You said there was nothing you could do."

"Do you have any idea what kind of alchemy that could do to him or the baby?"

"We were trying to save him!" Tony snaps. "Where the hell were you when we needed you?"

Strange doesn't take the bait, and instead keeps his focus on Steve. "You shouldn't have taken that serum. Now your life's in jeopardy. I didn't understand my vision at first, but now I do. You caused your own death."

Steve goes still, his breath caught in his throat. "What did you see?" he asks, his voice barely above a whisper.

"He didn't tell you?" Strange looks to Tony, then back to Steve.

"Tell me what? Tony? What is he talking about?" Steve pleads, his hand reaching out for Tony's.

"Can we have a minute?" Tony asks Helen.

She nods. "We'll be outside," she murmurs, then she leaves the room with Bruce.

"What did you see?" Steve demands, his voice rising slightly.

"Honey, you need to calm down." Tony tries to make Steve comfortable but Steve shakes him off.

"Don't tell me to calm down. What are you not telling me!"

Tony grows quiet, his head cast down, unable to look Steve in the eye. Steve turns his attention to Strange. "Tell me what you saw."

Strange's expression is grim. "You on an operating table. Blood everywhere. The baby crying. And then—nothing. Just silence."

Tony appears as if he's been punched in the chest. "No. No, we're not accepting that fate."

"It's not fate," Strange says. "It's a possibility. I told you, Stark, your son can't survive. He's too dangerous."

"He's not," Tony argues.

Strange doesn't even flinch at his harsh tone. "The combination of the super soldier serum and the Hydra compound—it's not natural. If he survives, then he'll become something we

can't control."

Steve tries to sit up, his rage battling weakness. "He's a *baby*. He's not a weapon. He's our *son*."

"That's not how the universe sees it," Strange says coldly. "I'm not saying this because I want to. The timelines don't lie. Every one where he lives ends in catastrophe."

Steve shakes his head, his eyes filling with tears, the anger inside him building and threatening to explode. "You'd kill him. You're trying to erase a threat that might not even exist. My son is not dangerous."

"He's killing you, Steve. And you won't be the only one that suffers because of him. I'm not going to stand by and let it happen. I can save you."

"I don't care what you've seen. Get out."

"Steve—"

"I said get out!"

The silence that follows is deafening. Strange stares hard at Steve, but Steve doesn't back down. Finally, Strange turns and walks toward the door.

"You'll call me when the collapse begins," Strange says without turning around. "But by then, it might be too late."

The door clicks shut behind him.

Steve exhales a shaky breath, a few tears rolling down his cheeks. He keeps a protective hand over his belly, finding some comfort in the movement his son produces. He winces when the kicks become too rough, but he bites back the groan of pain that tries to escape. He knows his son doesn't mean it. Peter isn't dangerous. Peter isn't going to hurt anyone.

"We don't have to call him for anything," Tony says after a few moments. "We have Bruce and Helen and that's enough. I'm sorry he disturbed you."

Steve's jaw tenses and he looks at Tony, his eyes dark with rage. "Get out."

Tony frowns, taken aback. "What?"

"Get. Out. You knew and you didn't tell me."

"How could I? I knew you'd choose our son and I just can't let that happen."

"So you agree with him? You want our son dead so I can live, is that it?"

"What? No! It's not like that!" Tony exclaims. "I just…" he sighs. "I want you to live, but I know you won't. Our son is killing you."

Steve turns away, his gaze falling to his belly. “If it means he lives, then let me die.”

“I’m not going to do that,” Tony snarls.

Steve snaps his head up. “It’s not up to you! I’m choosing to sacrifice myself.”

“All you’ve done is sacrifice yourself! For once I’m asking you to be selfish! I don’t want to lose you!” Tony shouts.

Steve says nothing. He’s made up his mind.

“If there was a way to save you both you know I’d do it,” Tony says, his tone softer now. He grabs Steve’s hand. “But, honey, there’s no way to save you both. We have to choose.”

Steve yanks his hand away. “I already made my choice.”

“Steve, listen to me! Don’t do this—”

“Get out!”

Tony grows silent and steps away. He opens his mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. “Fine,” he eventually says and he walks toward the door. He slams it hard on his way out.

The second he’s alone, Steve breaks down, the heavy emotions he’s been trying to conceal finally overwhelming him until he can’t hold them back.

Tears spill down his face, hot and silent at first, then wracking sobs he can’t contain. His body trembles with every breath. He curls in on himself, one hand cradling his swollen belly, the other gripping the blanket like it was some kind of lifeline.

“I’m sorry,” he says softly to his son. “I’m so sorry. Whatever happens…I’ll make sure you survive this.”

# Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony lingers outside Steve's private room, his hand gripping the door handle, the urge to rush back inside and comfort his husband too great, but he holds back. Steve told him to go, and like an idiot, Tony did. He regrets it now as he hears Steve's sobs from the other side of the door. Tony squeezes his eyes shut, leaning forward and resting his forehead against the wood, his fist crashing down, threatening to break through just to get to Steve.

He doesn't hear Strange approach until the sorcerer's quiet voice cuts through the heavy silence.

"Stark."

Tony doesn't move, doesn't lift his head. "Go away. You've caused enough problems. If you can't help us then leave."

"There's not much I can do."

"You can save him." Tony spins around to face Strange, his eyes dark with rage. "You don't have to let my son die. And if you don't help, I'm going to lose them both."

Strange's voice is low, regretful. "If there was a way to save them both, you know I'd do it."

Tony shakes his head, scoffing bitterly. "No, you wouldn't. You saw my son as a threat from the start, and now that's all you see. What if you're wrong? What if he's not dangerous? What if he's just…a kid? You let him die, and that's on you."

Strange exhales and turns away for a moment, then directs his gaze back to Tony. "I did have another vision."

Tony steps closer, almost nose-to-nose. "What did you see?"

"Not much. But there's a timeline where your son isn't a threat—he's a hero."

Tony's voice shakes. "So you're saying there's a chance? Why didn't you tell us before?"

Strange's expression hardens."Because I don't know if it's this timeline. It was just one possibility. And the odds—it's too big a risk."

"But if you're wrong." Tony's voice rises. "And he is good, and you do nothing—you'll be the reason he dies."

"I can't take that chance, Stark. You don't know what's at stake. He could be dangerous—"

Tony's fist connects with Strange's jaw before he finishes. Strange staggers back a step, stunned more by the grief behind the punch than the pain.

Strange doesn't retaliate. He straightens slowly, one hand at his jaw, blood spilling from the corner of his mouth.

"I deserve that," Strange says quietly. "But it doesn't change the truth."

Tony's chest rises and falls in sharp, furious bursts. "Then what good are you? What the hell is the point of having a wizard in the room if all you can do is watch?"

Before Strange can respond, a sound cuts through the air—a choked gasp, muffled behind the door.

Tony's body goes rigid. "Steve."

He lunges for the handle and yanks the door open. Inside, Steve is curled sideways on the hospital bed, clutching at his stomach, his face pale and drenched in sweat. The monitors blaring with warning tones.

"Steve." Tony rushes to his side, grabbing his hand. "Hey, honey. It's me. I'm here."

Steve's eyes flutter open. "T-Tony…" he whispers, his face twisting in pain. "Something's… wrong."

Strange is at the door in an instant. "He's destabilizing."

Tony snaps his head up at him, his grip on Steve tightening. "Do something. Please!"

"It's not him—it's the baby. He's too strong."

Steve lets out a cry, his body convulsing and eyes rolling to the back of his head.

Tony leans in close, his forehead pressing against Steve's. "Hold on, sweetheart. Please."

Steve cries out again, his body arching off the bed in pain, and the fetal monitor flat lines for a terrifying second before spiking erratically.

The door bursts open.

Helen runs into the room with Bruce behind her, both of them wide-eyed.

"What's happening?" Helen demands, rushing over to the monitors.

"I don't know," Tony says, his voice full of panic. "The baby's too strong. His body can't take it."

"A blend of Steve's enhancements and Hydra's experiments—it's throwing his system into overload," Strange says.

“His cells are fighting each other,” Bruce mutters, as he looks over the readings. “Organs, blood chemistry, even bone marrow. Everything’s destabilizing.”

Helen grabs a vial from her kit. “I still have that serum. We could try to stabilize him again.”

Tony looks to Strange. “Can you do anything to help him?”

Strange nods. “I can cast a stabilization ward. It won’t heal him, but it might prevent further collapse long enough for the serum to work.”

Tony grips Steve’s hand tighter. “Then do it.”

Strange lifts his hands, casting a golden glow over Steve’s body, murmuring incantations. A soft blue light spreads over Steve’s chest like a shield, pulsing gently in rhythm with his heartbeat.

Helen injects the suppressant into Steve’s IV.

Steve’s breathing begins to ease. The convulsions subside. The monitor’s erratic blips even out.

Bruce lets out a breath. “We’ve got him. And the baby… still holding on.”

Helen steps back, sweat on her brow. “That was too close.”

Tony collapses into the chair beside the bed, still holding Steve’s hand like a lifeline. “Too close,” he whispers.

---

The room is quiet now. The chaos has subsided, but there’s still fear and worry tugging at Tony. He remains by Steve’s side, fingers laced with his, unmoving except for the occasional twitch of his thumb brushing over Steve’s knuckles. He hasn’t spoken in a while. He’s just been there—watching, waiting.

Then, at last, Steve shifts.

Steve stirs with a small, broken sound, his brows knitting together as his eyes flutter open.

Tony bolts upright. “Steve? Hey. Hey, I’m here.”

Steve blinks slowly, dazed and weak. “Tony?”

“Yeah, sweetheart.” Tony leans in closer, voice trembling. “I’ve got you. You’re okay.”

Steve tries to sit up but winces. Tony gently presses a hand to his chest. “Easy. You don’t need to move. Just… stay with me.”

Steve’s eyes search his face. “The baby… Peter…”

Tony nods, tears gathering in his eyes. “He’s still with us. Both of you made it through.”

Steve exhales a shaky breath. “I thought—I thought we were gonna lose him.”

“We almost did,” Tony admits, voice cracking. “You both scared the hell out of me.”

Steve’s fingers curl weakly around Tony’s. “You didn’t leave.”

“Not for a second,” Tony says, brushing his thumb over Steve’s cheek. “Strange helped. Bruce and Helen too. You’ve got a whole damn army behind you.”

Steve lets out a soft, almost disbelieving laugh. “How bad is it?”

Tony swallows. “Bad enough. But we’ve bought some time. Helen thinks we can keep stabilizing things as Peter grows. Strange… did something. Not sure what, but it helped.”

“He’s strong, isn’t he?”

Tony nods. “Stronger than any of us expected. He’s going to be stubborn. Just like you.”

A soft smile flickers at Steve’s lips. “We’ll need to teach him how to use it right.”

Tony leans forward, pressing his forehead to Steve’s.

“We will. Together. You hear me? You’re not going anywhere.”

Steve exhales slowly, leaning into him. “I’m not leaving you. I swear it.”

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter is short but I wanted to post something. Life has been so crazy and it’s been hard, but writing brings me joy and I want to keep doing this. I have more stories I want to work on and hopefully get some WIPs finished.

Thank you for reading! ❤️

# Chapter 26

Steve rests his head back against the pillow, his eyes drifting shut. He can hear Tony shuffling around the room — no doubt trying to find new ways to keep him comfortable. Helen had ordered strict bed rest and for Steve to stay in the medical wing for a few days so that both he and the baby could be closely monitored. Steve didn't protest. He knew he needed the rest. Peter was counting on it.

Tony stays by Steve's side, always ready to help with anything he needs. Steve appreciates having his husband there, but after a few days, it starts to feel smothering. He needs more than quiet care. He needs the comfort of his friends.

Bucky and Natasha don't hesitate to show up. Sam is busy with work but promises to stop by as soon as he can.

The afternoon is peaceful. Bruce and Helen have only come in twice — once when Steve's blood pressure spiked, and again when the fetal monitor blared a warning tone. Much to Steve's relief, Peter stabilized quickly, and no further issues arose.

Natasha had suggested they just sit and talk, but Bucky pulled out UNO, and that's what they ended up doing.

"How are you feeling now?" Bucky asks, sorting through his stack of cards.

"Tired," Steve replies weakly. "More than usual."

"Bruce told us what happened," Natasha says as she lays down a card, making Bucky groan."Sorry, Barnes. That's how the game goes."

"I regret this game," Bucky mutters.

Steve smiles softly, then it falters. "I'm sorry about the wedding, Buck."

"Don't be." Bucky finally finds a card he can play and sets it down. This time, Natasha scowls and grumbles. He looks up at Steve, offering a warm smile. "I'm just glad you and my nephew are okay."

"Thanks." Steve smiles back. Exhaustion creeps over him again, and he tries to stifle a yawn but fails miserably.

"Do you want us to go?" Natasha asks gently.

Steve shakes his head. "No. I like having you here. Things feel… normal." He pauses, then adds, "I don't know how much longer that's going to last."

“Not long,” Natasha says with a chuckle. “Once that baby gets here, things are going to be crazy. But that’s what you have us for.”

“Exactly,” Bucky adds. “I can babysit whenever you need me.”

“Just wait until you and Sam have a baby,” Natasha teases, nudging Bucky with her shoulder.

He scoffs and draws a card, switching the color from blue to red. “I don’t think I want kids anymore. I’ve seen what it’s done to Steve and—oh shit, Steve, I’m sorry!”

Steve shakes his head, waving Bucky off, but the words linger heavier than he wants to admit.

“I understand,” he says quietly. “Maybe you’ll be lucky, and your body won’t act like mine.”

Guilt flickers across Bucky’s features. “Steve, I didn’t mean it like that. You know that, right?”

“I do,” Steve says. “It’s just… hard sometimes. I didn’t expect any of this to be easy, but I guess I wasn’t ready for how out of control I’d feel. Like my body isn’t mine anymore.”

The room falls quiet, the hum of the machines the only sound for a few moments. Natasha leans forward, resting her elbows on her knees.

“It’s okay to admit you’re scared,” she says softly. “You don’t have to be Captain America right now.”

Steve huffs out a tired laugh. “Yeah, well… I can’t exactly be Steve Rogers either. He’s fading away too.”

Bucky and Natasha share a look. Natasha moves closer to Steve, abandoning the game so she can sit next to him. She wraps an arm around him and holds him close.

“You can’t let him fade away, too,” she says softly.

Steve blinks back the sting in his eyes. “I’m trying. I really am.”

The door to the medical suite creaks open. Tony peeks in, his expression cautious, like he’s worried he’ll find Steve asleep or worse. When he sees Steve sitting up and talking, some of the tension melts from his shoulders.

“Hey,” Tony says, stepping in. “Everything okay in here?”

“We’re playing cutthroat UNO and emotionally supporting your husband,” Natasha replies dryly.

Tony chuckles and walks over to Steve, leaning down to press a soft kiss to his forehead. “Need anything?”

Steve looks around at his friends, the soft pile of cards on the tray in front of him, and then at Tony — warm eyes and messy hair, trying to be strong in his own way.

“No,” he murmurs. “I’ve got everything I need right here.”

---

Steve had thought that once he was discharged and allowed to return home, things would get better. He was wrong.

His health continued to deteriorate — slow and steady, like a fuse burning toward something he couldn’t stop. Tony was worried. That much was obvious. And Steve could see he was nearing his breaking point.

But there was nothing either of them could do.

Tony hovered constantly, refusing to leave Steve’s side. He rarely went to the lab anymore, and when he did, he came back smelling like alcohol. Steve didn’t have to ask to know the truth.

He was the reason Tony was drinking again.

Everything was falling apart.

And it was all his fault.

Steve finally decides to confront him one night. Tony comes home late — sometime after three in the morning. Steve lies in bed, listening to him stumble around downstairs before eventually making his way to the stairs. Steve grits his teeth, trying to hold back the anger that’s been threatening to boil over for days.

Inside his womb, Peter stirs. The kicks and rolls are so strong, they force a grunt of pain from Steve. He lays a hand over his belly, trying to soothe his son. Peter settles but then, a sharp pain shoots across Steve’s abdomen.

Tony walks in then, unsteady on his feet, swaying as he navigates the room. His eyes are bloodshot and puffy, and his hair is a wild mess — like he’s run his hands through it too many times.

“You’re… still… awake?” Tony asks, his words slurred.

“Was waiting for you,” Steve replies, his tone hard, revealing the irritation simmering beneath the surface. “Why are you drinking?”

“Hm?” Tony stumbles to the bed, managing to drop onto the edge. “‘M not… drinking.”

Steve rolls his eyes, jaw clenching. “You’re a liar.”

Tony turns to face him, unsteady, and points a finger. “You’re the liar. You said we’d… have this baby together, and now you don’t even care if you die. You’d rather leave me. You

promised, Steve."

Steve exhales shakily, rubbing his belly with a trembling hand, trying to calm both himself and the baby. He ignores the sharp pain still twisting through his gut.

"I haven't broken any promises," he says finally, meeting Tony's eyes. "I want to do this with you. But if it comes down to making a choice—"

Tony rolls his eyes. "Oh geez…"

"—then we have to choose our son. Why is that so hard for you to accept?"

"Because I don't want to choose him!" Tony shouts. The volume startles Steve. "I choose you! I'd choose you over him if it means saving your life."

Steve stares at him, stunned. "He's your son."

"He's a threat," Tony spits. "Strange said it himself. He doesn't deserve—"

"To what?" Steve cuts in, voice sharp. "To live?"

Tony falls silent. He turns away, rising unsteadily to his feet. He mutters something under his breath, too low to hear.

"What did you say?" Steve demands.

Tony doesn't answer. He staggers forward, nearly toppling over, catching himself only with the help of the bed.

With a frustrated huff, Steve throws the covers off and tries to get out of bed. Pain slices through him, sharp and immediate. He cries out, arms wrapping protectively around his belly as he curls inward, his face contorted with agony.

"Honey?" Tony's voice is suddenly close, softer. When Steve opens his eyes, Tony is kneeling beside the bed, one hand on his shoulder.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know," Steve gasps. He clutches Tony's hand, his grip desperate. "It hurts. It hurts a lot."

"I'm calling Helen," Tony says, turning to go.

"Tony!" Steve grabs for him, not letting him leave. "Don't—please. I'm scared."

"I'm right here," Tony says softly, and he kisses Steve's head. "Hang on, sweetheart. Just hang on."

---

Steve cries out, his body twisting sideways, face buried in Tony's chest. Tony holds him tight, whispering soft, frantic nothings in his ear, trying to soothe him even though he's trembling himself.

The door bursts open and Helen strides in, Bruce close behind. Their presence is a lifeline.

"Steve, talk to me," Helen says, voice calm but firm.

"He said it feels like contractions, but something's off," Tony answers for him, brushing Steve's hair back, eyes wide with worry. "It's not like before."

Helen moves quickly to the monitors. Bruce checks the readouts beside her.

"He's going into labor," Bruce says quietly.

"What? Now?" Tony's panic spikes. "It's too early. Isn't it too early?"

"I expected this might happen," Helen says."Steve's body is under too much strain. But we're prepared. He's in the best place he can be."

Steve lifts his head from Tony's chest, his eyes glassy with tears. "Can you stop it?" His voice breaks. "Please — he's not ready. He's not ready yet."

Helen steps closer and places a steady hand on Steve's shoulder. "I know this is terrifying, Steve. But your body can't keep fighting. You're in labor and we need to let it happen. Peter needs to come out."

"No." Steve shakes his head, tears slipping down his cheeks. "What if he's not strong enough? I can't lose him. Please, Helen, stop it."

Bruce speaks up, gently but with conviction. "We're not going to let that happen. We're monitoring everything. We'll do whatever it takes to keep you both safe."

Another contraction rips through Steve like lightning and he lets out a raw scream, doubling over as Tony grips him tighter.

Helen immediately pulls on a pair of gloves and moves to the foot of the bed. "Steve, I need to check your dilation, okay?"

Steve nods weakly, gritting his teeth through the pain.

Helen works quickly and calmly. "You're at four centimeters... and—oh. Your water just broke."

Steve gasps as the warm rush hits, panic climbing higher.

Helen meets his eyes. "We can't stop this, Steve. You're going to deliver today."

"I'm scared," Steve admits quietly.

“I know,” Helen says. “But I promise everything is going to be fine. I won’t let anything happen to you or Peter.”

# Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

> So I've been sick and I got some time to write this thing! this chapter is longer and it took me forever! I guess I wanted it to be perfect. Anyway, I hope you all enjoy!

They decide not to tell their friends about Steve's labor right away. If Tony had it his way, he'd wait until after the delivery. Steve's body was already drained, struggling to stay awake. The last thing he needed was their well-meaning friends accidentally stealing what little energy he had left. He needed to save his strength for the birth.

But Tony knew how stubborn his husband could be. Sooner or later, Steve would want to see them. Until then, Tony focused on keeping him as comfortable as possible—though there was only so much he could do. And that killed him.

The room is silent, save for the soft beeping of the monitors and Steve's shallow breathing. Tony keeps his eyes on him, ready to leap into action if needed. Hours ago, Steve had assured him he was fine and just wanted to rest. There was still a lull between contractions, giving him time to sleep.

But now Tony noticed how labored Steve's breathing had become. A slight wheeze crept in—one that reminded Tony too much of the nights Steve's asthma used to steal his breath.

Tony leans forward in his chair, elbows on his knees, eyes never leaving Steve's face. His gaze occasionally drifts to the fetal monitor, watching the steady blip of Peter's heartbeat. Strong. Consistent. Their son was holding on.

If only Steve was too.

It wasn't fair.

Peter was supposed to need them. Not the other way around. And yet here they were—Steve fading, Peter thriving. Steve, who had once been the unbreakable shield, the immovable force, the man who took down armies and got back up no matter how many times he was knocked down.

Now he was pale. Drenched in sweat. Breathing like it hurt.

Tony's fingers tighten into fists. He had seen Steve break before—emotionally, physically—but never like this. Never so quietly. This wasn't a war zone. There was no HYDRA, no alien invasion. Just a hospital room, a too-silent monitor, and a man slipping beneath the weight of a battle no one trained him to fight.

Tony swallows hard, his throat thick. Something gnaws at him—an instinct, sharp and cold and persistent. What if this was it? What if the serum, the strength, the stubborn will that had carried Steve through everything else… wasn't enough now?

What if Steve didn't get back up this time?

He hates himself for the thought. But it won't go away.

Tony reaches out again, taking Steve's hand in both of his. "You don't get to do this," he whispers, voice cracking. "You don't get to leave me. Not now. Not when we're so close."

There's a flicker. A twitch in Steve's fingers. Barely there, but real.

Tony blinks hard, brushing his thumb over Steve's knuckles like it might anchor him. "You hear me? Peter's waiting for you. I'm waiting for you. So you fight, Rogers. You fight like hell."

Behind him, the monitor beeps again—steady, strong. Their son is still okay.

Now Tony needs Steve to be, too.

He adjusts the oxygen tube gently resting under Steve's nose, even though the nurse had already checked it. It's not enough. Nothing feels like enough.

"Hey," Tony whispers, his voice breaking the silence. "You gotta breathe for me, sweetheart. Just breathe."

Steve stirs faintly, brows pulling together in a flicker of discomfort. His lips part, and Tony hears the wheeze again—soft, but unmistakable.

Tony reaches for the call button, pressing it without hesitation. "Come on, come on," he mutters under his breath.

The door swings open within seconds, and Helen steps in, calm but alert. "Something wrong, Mr. Stark?"

"His breathing's changed. He's wheezing."

Helen crosses the room quickly, checking the monitors, her fingers already moving with professional precision as she listens to Steve's chest. "Okay," she says after a moment, "His oxygen saturation is dropping a bit. We'll increase the flow and monitor him closely."

Tony nods tightly, jaw tight. "Shouldn't we be doing more?"

"You caught it early. That helps," she says gently. "We'll keep him stable."

But stable isn't enough. Not to Tony.

He reaches out and brushes a damp strand of hair off Steve's forehead, his hand trembling. "You promised you were okay," he murmurs, more to himself than anything. "Don't scare me

like this."

Steve doesn't answer. He's too far under, too exhausted. But he shifts slightly at Tony's touch, and that tiny sign of life is enough—for now.

Tony sits back again, never letting go of Steve's hand.

A few minutes go by. Sleep threatens to take over, but Tony forces his eyes to stay open. He had no idea how long Steve's labor was going to take, then came the task of actually birthing their son. It could take all night for all he knew, though he hopes it doesn't. He can't imagine watching Steve suffer like this. It's already too much.

"Tony?" Steve shifts, it's subtle, but enough for Tony to notice, and he sits up.

"I'm right here," he assures, giving Steve's hand a gentle squeeze.

Steve slowly opens his eyes and turns his head toward Tony. Steve's gaze locks with Tony's, tired but steady. For a moment, the pain fades just enough to let something softer through.

"He's almost here," Steve whispers.

Tony's lips curl into a small smile. "Yeah, honey, he is."

Steve's eyes flutter closed, only to shoot open with determination. "He's going to be so much like you. Smart, brave, selfless. He's going to be good."

Tony leans closer, brushing a fingertip over Steve's cheek. "He'll have the best role models. You and me. We'll make sure of it."

Steve smiles weakly. "I already know he's going to sneak down into the lab to build things with you."

"Just so we're clear, he's allowed with me?"

Steve chuckles, then it turns into a coughing fit. Tony quickly grabs the tumbler of ice water, offering Steve a sip. Steve takes a few drinks, then he lies his head back, his eyes falling shut.

"He'll probably be…Nat's favorite. She's going to spoil him."

"Probably. Doesn't surprise me."

Steve opens his eyes again and locks them with Tony's. "I bet Sam and Bucky will take him on the boat." Steve coughs again, then he inhales, the wheezing returning. "Bruce will teach him things. Maybe Thor and Clint will…visit…and meet him."

Tony blinks fast to hold back his tears. Not once has Steve mentioned himself doing anything with Peter.

"Honey, you know he'll probably hijack your training sessions. And try not to leave your art supplies out because he will get into it. Imagine the mess we'll find—paint all over him and

the walls. Jesus."

Steve smiles, almost as if he's imagining the scene for himself.

"And for Halloween," Tony continues, "I'll get him a Cap costume. You're going to be his favorite after all."

Steve's grip tightens on Tony's hand. "Promise me... you'll keep him safe."

Tony swallows hard, nodding. "I promise. I'll keep both of you safe. No matter what."

---

The contractions are coming in relentless waves now, one after the other, giving Steve no time to breathe between them.

Then another contraction hits. Steve cries out, back arching off the bed in agony.

Tony grips his hand tightly, leaning in with soft, desperate whispers—words meant to comfort, but powerless against the pain tearing through Steve's body as he fights to bring their son into the world.

Tony's chest aches. All he can do is hold on. It's not enough.

"You got this, sweetheart," Tony whispers once Steve's body finally eases into a fragile stillness.

Steve blinks his eyes open, turning his head toward Tony. His grip tightens around Tony's hand. "It hurts," he rasps. "Everything… my body… Tony, I can't."

"I know, I know," Tony soothes, brushing a damp strand of hair from Steve's forehead. He studies his husband's face, barely recognizing the man before him. Thinner now, skin stretched tight over bone. Eyes dulled, losing their usual spark, but still fighting.

Steve winces, a sharp intake of breath escaping him.

Tony's eyes flick to the monitor, watching the numbers climb—he knows exactly when the contraction peaks.

Seconds later, Steve screams, the pain taking hold like a vise.

His screams fill the room, raw and desperate. Tony squeezes his hand. The pain intensifies and Steve's body twists toward Tony, his skinny arms wrapping around Tony, clinging to him for dear life.

"Breathe, sweetheart. You need to breathe," Tony murmurs, his voice steady despite the pounding in his chest.

Steve nods weakly, his eyes glassy but focused on Tony's face. The next wave builds quickly—more intense, more urgent. Tony feels the tension in Steve's grip, the way his muscles tremble beneath his skin.

“Tony… something’s…”

By some miracle, Helen rushes into the room with Bruce, both ready to intervene if needed.

“Steve, talk to me,” Helen says, slipping on a pair of gloves. “How bad is it?”

Steve can only manage a groan, his face burying into Tony’s chest, fingers clutching tightly at the front of Tony’s shirt.

“Based on the readings, I believe he’s in active labor,” Bruce says, eyes flicking over the monitor.

Helen nods sharply, moving to the foot of the bed. She leans forward and pulls the thin sheet aside. “Steve, I need to check your dilation. Just breathe, try to relax, okay?”

“You got this, baby,” Tony whispers softly.

Steve shifts slightly, opening his legs to give Helen access.

Helen’s fingers move carefully. “I think I feel his head. The baby’s in position. It’s time to start pushing.”

Steve’s breath catches as Helen’s words settle in the room. He looks at Tony, revealing the fear in them. Tony leans in, pressing a kiss to Steve’s forehead.

“Okay, Steve,” Helen says gently but firmly. “When you feel the next contraction, I want you to push with everything you have. I’ll guide you through it.”

“I’m right here. You’re not alone. Just focus on me,” Tony murmurs.

Steve nods weakly, sweat glistening on his forehead. The next contraction hits hard—sharp and unrelenting. Steve’s body tenses, and with Tony’s voice steady in his ear, he gathers every ounce of strength.

“Push, Steve. Push,” Helen encourages.

Steve strains, a guttural sound escaping his lips as he pushes. His face twists in pain, eyes squeezed shut, but the baby barely moves.

The minutes stretch on. Contractions come faster, more intensely. Steve’s energy begins to drain with every effort.

Tony’s heart breaks seeing him like this, but he keeps his voice calm, steady. “You’re doing amazing, baby. Keep going.”

Steve’s breaths come in ragged gasps. His body trembles, his muscles screaming.

“I can’t,” Steve rasps between pushes. “It’s too much.”

Tony shakes his head gently. “Yes, you can. You’re the strongest man I know. Peter is almost here. We finally get to meet him.”

Helen steps in quickly. “We might need to try a different approach. Steve, stay with me.”

Steve’s fingers tighten around Tony’s hand, seeking strength. He nods, willing himself to push again, even as his body screams for rest.

After another unsuccessful round of pushing, Steve slumps back against the pillows, chest heaving, soaked in sweat. His face is pale, lips trembling, his strength slipping with every contraction.

Helen glances up at Bruce, her expression unreadable. Bruce gives a small nod, then quietly excuses himself from the room.

Tony’s eyes follow him, heart rate spiking.

“What’s going on?” he asks, his voice tight, the grip he has on Steve’s hand tightening.

Helen doesn’t answer right away. She focuses on gently wiping Steve’s brow, keeping her voice even. “We just want to make sure we have every possible hand ready, just in case.”

Tony doesn’t like the sound of that.

Less than a minute later, Bruce returns—and this time, Strange is with him.

Tony’s stomach drops.

Strange’s expression is calm, but serious. He approaches the side of the bed opposite Tony and gives Steve a quick once-over. “Heard someone needed a bit of help.”

Steve barely opens his eyes. “Not dying, doc... just feels like it.”

Strange gives the faintest smirk. “Let’s make sure it stays that way.”

“I don’t want him here,” Tony snarls, eyes locked on Strange like a threat.

Strange barely flinches, but his gaze shifts calmly to Tony.

“Tony, he’s the only one who can help us right now,” Helen says firmly. “I made a promise to keep both Steve and Peter alive. This is how I keep it.”

Tony’s jaw tightens. “From the guy who wants my son dead? Find someone else.”

“Steve will die if I don’t intervene now,” Strange says, his voice steady, no hint of ego—just fact.

“I don’t trust you!” Tony snaps, his voice rising. “What part of that are you not getting!”

Then—

A pressure at his hand.

Steve grips Tony's hand tighter, forcing his gaze away from Strange. Tony turns, and what he sees in Steve's eyes silences him.

"Please?" Steve rasps. "We need him. Please."

He swallows hard, nodding once. Not for Strange. For Steve.

"Fine," Tony says through gritted teeth. "But if anything goes wrong—anything—I won't let you walk away from it."

Strange inclines his head. "Noted."

Strange steps closer, rolling up the sleeves of his tunic as a faint golden shimmer begins to flicker between his fingers. His usual composure remains, but there's a sharpness in his movements—he knows what's at stake.

"I'm going to stabilize him first," Strange says, glancing toward Helen. "His vitals are crashing between contractions. His body's barely hanging on."

"Can you buy us time?" she asks.

"Maybe," Strange replies. "But we're cutting it close."

He places his hands just above Steve's abdomen. Glowing sigils form beneath his palms, hovering over Steve's skin. Steve shudders as the magic sinks into him, but the tension in his muscles starts to ease, ever so slightly.

Tony watches, torn between hope and fear.

"What are you doing to him?" he asks, voice tight.

"Supporting his system—nervous, muscular, circulatory. I'm not interfering with the labor itself," Strange says. "I'm just giving his body a fighting chance to get through it."

Steve lets out a shaky breath, blinking up at Tony. "It... it feels better," he whispers. "Still hurts, but I can breathe."

Helen checks the monitor, then nods at Strange. "It's working. His oxygen levels are climbing again."

Strange's hands remain steady. "But it won't last forever. We still need to deliver the baby. And soon."

Helen looks up at Steve. "You ready?"

Steve exhales through gritted teeth and nods weakly.

Tony leans in close, pressing his forehead to Steve's. "You've got this. I'm right here."

Strange withdraws his hands, the golden glow fading. “I’ll be back in a moment. I need to scrub in.”

He turns and leaves without waiting for a response, the door hissing softly shut behind him. For the first time in what feels like hours, the room is still.

Tony leans in, brushing the hair from Steve’s damp forehead. Steve’s breathing has evened out slightly—still labored, still weak, but no longer panicked.

“How are you holding up?” Tony asks, his voice low.

Steve gives a faint huff, a ghost of a smile. “Like I’m being ripped in half.”

Tony huffs a soft, pained laugh. “Yeah, well, you’re doing better than I would.”

“Liar,” Steve whispers.

Tony gently cups Steve’s cheek. “You scare the hell out of me, you know that?”

Steve’s smile falters, his eyes glossy. “I’m scared too.”

Tony leans in, resting his forehead lightly against Steve’s. “We’re so close, sweetheart. Just a little more. Then we get to meet him.”

Steve breathes out, a whisper of resolve. “I’m ready.”

Strange returns, now in scrubs and gloves, his expression focused. He takes his place beside Helen at the foot of the bed.

“Vitals are stable for now,” Helen reports quickly. “Let’s move.”

Tony shifts back to Steve’s side, grasping his hand with both of his. “We’re ready,” he says, even if the words feel fragile.

Steve barely nods, sweat beading along his hairline. The monitor spikes again.

Helen looks up. “Contraction starting. Steve, deep breath. Push when I say.”

Steve braces, his jaw clenched, muscles shaking.

“Now. Push!”

Steve bears down with a raw, guttural cry, every part of him straining. Tony’s hand aches from the force of Steve’s grip, but he doesn’t let go.

Helen counts. “One… two… three… keep going…”

Steve gasps for breath, eyes screwed shut as pain tears through him. “I can’t—”

“You can,” Tony says, voice firm through the tremble. “You’re doing it. You’re doing amazing.”

Steve screams as the contraction peaks.

Strange's voice is urgent. “Head’s crowning. We’re getting close—Steve, one more big push.”

Steve’s whole body trembles. “Tony—” he chokes, “—I love you.”

Tony’s heart nearly breaks. “I love you too. So much. Just a little more, baby. You’re almost there.”

Another contraction barrels through. Steve throws his head back, crying out as he pushes again, pouring everything into it—his fear, his strength, his love.

“We need to push again, Steve,” Helen says. “Contractions are intensifying.”

Steve barely responds, his head lolling slightly to the side. His skin is chalk-pale, drenched in sweat.

“Steve?” Tony gently cups his face. “Come on, sweetheart. Look at me.”

Steve’s eyes barely flutter open. “Tired,” he whispers. “Tony, I don’t… I don’t feel right…”

Then the monitor beside them lets out a sharp alarm.

“Heart rate’s dropping,” Bruce says quickly, eyes fixed on the screen.

Helen looks at Strange. “We’re losing him.”

“I see it,” Strange replies, his voice tight.

Tony panics. “What’s happening!”

“His body’s shutting down,” Helen says. “He’s past the point of exhaustion—he’s not getting enough oxygen.”

“Then do something!” Tony shouts, his voice cracking.

“We are,” Strange snaps. “But he has to push now.”

Tony turns back to Steve, who’s barely conscious, his lips tinged with blue. “Steve—baby, please. You have to stay with me. You can do this. Just one more push, I know you can.”

Steve blinks, barely able to speak. “Hurts… I’m scared.”

“I’m scared too,” Tony says, brushing their foreheads together. “But you’re not alone. I’ve got you. We’re going to meet him, Steve. You’re going to hold our son. You just have to fight. One more time.”

Steve grits his teeth and lets out a broken, primal scream as he pushes with what little strength remains. Blood rushes from beneath the sheet—too much of it.

Helen stays steady, her arm tucked under Steve's knee. She peers down. “The head’s out! Tony, talk to him!”

“You’re doing it!” Tony cries, eyes streaming. “I see him, Steve! He’s almost here! Come on, honey. Just a little more!”

Strange peers up. “Rogers, push!” he nearly growls.

“He can’t!” Tony shouts. “Give him a fucking minute!”

“We don’t have one!” Strange’s voice rises in volume to match Tony’s. “If he doesn’t push now then—”

The fetal monitor blares loudly. Strange mutters a curse.

“Banner?”

“Baby’s heart rate is dropping. He’s in distress,” Bruce replies.

“We need to get this baby out now,” Strange says, his voice stern and determined. “Prepare for an emergency cesarean.”

“No.” Steve shakes his head, his eyes welling up with tears. “I can push harder. I can do it.”

Tony doesn’t miss the way his husband’s voice shakes with fear. He holds Steve’s hand, a silent promise to remain by his side no matter what. “It’s going to be okay,” he assures softly.

A tear rolls down Steve’s face. “I don’t want him to die,” he says quietly.

“He’s not going to die,” Tony says firmly.

“I’ll push harder. Just let me push. Strange, please?” Steve begs.

Strange hesitates for only a second before nodding sharply. “One last chance. But we move the second anything worsens. Understood?”

“Understood,” Helen says. “Steve, next contraction—you give it everything.”

Bruce adjusts the IV. “Oxygen ready. Fluids going.”

Tony leans in, kissing Steve’s damp forehead. “I’m right here, baby. Look at me.”

Steve’s body tenses again—another contraction hits, hard and fast.

Helen shouts, “Now, Steve! Push!”

Steve screams through clenched teeth, muscles trembling violently as he bears down. Blood darkens the sheets, and the monitor shrieks as the baby's heart rate dips again.

Tony squeezes Steve’s hand. “You’ve got him, Steve. He’s almost here. Just a little more.”

“Again!” Strange yells.

Steve gasps, chest heaving, but doesn’t wait—he pushes again, harder, his voice breaking in a hoarse, desperate sob.

“I see shoulders!” Strange says, urgency sharp in his tone. “One more push!”

Steve roars, every fiber of him screaming in pain and exhaustion, his back arching as he gives one final push.

Then everything goes silent.

Followed by a wet, crackling cry.

Strange lifts the baby, voice breathless. “He’s out. He’s breathing, but barely.”

Bruce lets out a choked breath.

Tony collapses forward onto the bed, eyes brimming. “Oh my God.”

“I got him.” Helen quickly intervenes, whisking the baby away, barely giving the new parents a glimpse of him. All Tony is able to make out is the dark hair on Peter’s head.

“Tony?”

Tony snaps his attention to Steve, his heart shattering at the sight of him. Steve’s skin is white, all the color drained from his face. Small wheezed gasps leave his blue-tinged lips.

“Steve?” Tony touches his face. “Steve, look at me.”

Steve slowly turns his head, his eyes fluttering. The grip he has on Tony’s hand loosening.

“Stay with me,” Tony urges. “Peter’s here. You did it, honey.”

“Peter?” Steve murmurs, voice barely above a whisper. His eyes roam over the room, as if searching for his son.

“He’s with Helen,” Tony answers his question. “She’s with him right now.”

Steve gives a small nod, his eyes fluttering again. “Tired…”

“I know, but Strange is going to make sure you’re okay. You can rest now.”

“Go. Tony, go with him. Our son…needs you.”

Tony looks over at the door that’s been shut, a part of him torn between being with his son and Steve. He’s being tugged in both directions, but he fights it, wanting to be with Steve.

“Please?” Steve begs. “He’s scared. He needs his dad.”

Before Tony can make a decision, Bruce speaks up. “We got him, Tony. Go be with your son.”

Tony nods. “Don’t let anything happen, Bruce. Promise me.”

“I promise.”

Steve takes Tony’s hand again. “Kiss me.”

Tony doesn’t hesitate and he leans in, pressing his lips against Steve’s. He allows his lips to linger a little longer, too afraid to pull away and never get the chance to kiss these lips again.

But he’s forced to pull away after a moment. “I love you,” Tony whispers, softly caressing Steve’s pale cheek.

“I love you, too. See you in a minute.” Steve smiles weakly at him, their hands still interlocked.

Tony nods, his hand slipping from Steve’s. They share one last look, then Tony leaves the room, the door shutting behind him.

# Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

I couldn't leave yall hanging for long! Trigger warning for blood.

All Steve can think about is his son. He hopes and prays that he's okay, that he fights hard to stay alive and prove to everyone that he's worth fighting for. Helen had taken him away so fast Steve wasn't able to see him. All he knew was Peter cried. It wasn't very strong, but it didn't matter. Because he made a sound, letting the whole world know that he was here and going to fight for his place to stay.

Steve strains his ears in hopes of hearing his son again. He knows he's just down the hall, safe with both Helen and Tony. But he wants to hear him again. One last time. But his keen hearing is gone; the only sounds he can make out are the monitors hooked up to him.

Then he hears Strange's voice cut through the noise. It's muffled at first, almost as if Steve's underwater. His mind flashes back to the plane and the icy water that greeted him. He waits for death's icy fingers to take hold of him again, and this time he finds he can't fight back. His body is too weak, drained from the long, torturous months of his pregnancy, and then the agonizing birth. He could rest now, Tony said it himself.

Peter was safe. He stood a chance. Steve could let go.

But it's not that simple. There's a part of him that wants to keep going, the part that always fought back when he was pushed down. It flickers inside of him, weakened slightly, but still trying to fight a little longer. His son needed him to keep going.

"Rogers?" The sharpness in Strange's tone snaps Steve's attention to him. Steve blinks and slowly lifts his head, only for his skull to feel too heavy and he has no choice but to lie back. "Rogers, stay with me!"

"Peter…" Steve manages to say, his voice low.

"He's okay," Bruce answers, but there's something in his tone that doesn't sound right.

Steve's eyes roam around the room, searching for something he can't name. The ceiling fades in and out of focus. It's just a blur of white and shadow, but for some reason it reminds him of snow falling in Brooklyn. He remembers walking home with Bucky one winter, both of them shivering, boots soaked, laughing like they didn't have a care in the world.

Cold, quiet, endless. That kind of peace.

“Dammit! He’s hemorrhaging!”

Was he? Steve felt the rush of warm blood during the birth, but he didn’t feel anymore pain. In fact, all he felt was peace.

His thoughts drift to his mother and all the times she was there when he needed her most. He can still feel the warmth of her hand in his, the way her presence chased away every shadow. Her voice echoes in his mind now, soft and strong, the kind that could soothe even the deepest wound.

There’s peace in thinking she’s waiting for him.

He’s always believed in Heaven — a place free from pain and struggle, where the people you love are waiting with open arms. He wonders if he’ll see Peggy, maybe even the Howlies again. He can almost picture their smiles, waiting for him just beyond the veil.

*Not yet. Your family needs you. Your friends need you.*

The old stubborn fire flickers to life again — not strong, but there. Steve’s never been good at letting go, especially when people still needed him. Peter still needed him.

But his body won’t cooperate. It feels heavy, like it's been filled with wet sand. His limbs won’t move, and the bed beneath him feels impossibly deep. His eyelids start to droop, and he just needs to rest — just for a second, let his body catch up.

“Stay awake, Rogers!” Strange’s voice cuts through the haze, sharp and urgent.

Steve blinks slowly. Was Strange afraid? That thought sticks with him. The man who never flinched, never hesitated — was he actually scared?

Then Bruce’s voice comes next, cracked and raw. “He’s losing too much blood.”

*Don’t turn green*, Steve thinks faintly. *I need Bruce right now. Not the other guy*.

He lets his eyes fall shut. Just a moment. Just—

The peace shatters. Agony tears through him. His body arches as a scream rips from his throat.

Strange is pressing down on his abdomen, hands soaked in blood. Steve gasps, struggling to breathe.

“S-Stop,” he chokes.

“Steve,” Bruce says urgently, beside him now. “It’s to stop the bleeding.”

“Hurts…”

It doesn't stop. It won't stop. The pain claws through every nerve like fire, dragging him under.

And then it ends. Strange pulls back, cursing. Steve lifts his head just enough to see the dark red coating his gloves, his scrubs — the whole room feels painted in blood.

*You're not going to make it*, something whispers. *Rest now*.

And he wants to. God, he wants to. But first he needs to make sure—

"My baby?" Steve's voice is barely a whisper.

"He's okay," Bruce answers gently. "Helen's with him. Tony's there, too. He's stable. He's fighting."

Steve smiles weakly, the corners of his mouth twitching upward. He reaches for Bruce's hand, finding it and gripping it with the last of his strength.

"Make sure he's okay," he rasps. "He's gonna need you. He'll blame himself. Don't let him."

Bruce's face crumples. The reality is setting in, and Steve sees it in his eyes.

"Please?" Steve squeezes Bruce's hand. "Promise me."

"I will," Bruce says quietly. "I promise."

Steve looks up at him, wanting to say more — to thank him for everything he's done. But there's no time. No strength.

His eyes drift to Strange, meeting the sorcerer's gaze. "Let him live. He's good. Strange, he's good."

"All I care about is keeping *you* alive," Strange snaps. "Now stay with me, do you hear me?"

"Let me go," Steve whispers. His eyelids flutter shut.

"Rogers! Stay with me! That's an order, soldier!"

The monitor shrieks — high-pitched, urgent.

Steve's body convulses once, then goes eerily still. His skin is ghost-pale, lips tinged blue. The rise and fall of his chest becomes shallow, uneven.

"Pulse is dropping," Bruce says, panic rising in his voice. "BP's tanking—he's crashing!"

"Not yet!" Strange snaps, sleeves already soaked in blood as he works with brutal speed, clearing away remnants of the placenta. "Come on," he mutters through gritted teeth. "You don't get to die today."

Blood gushes from Steve's body, soaking the sheets and splashing onto the floor. The dark liquid seems endless, pooling beneath the bed. Every attempt to stop the hemorrhaging is failing. The monitors scream in protest — too fast, too loud, then suddenly dropping off.

"I need to cut him open," Strange says quickly, reaching for a scalpel from the tray.

"He won't survive that!" Bruce cries. "Strange, he's too far gone—his heart won't take it!"

"He's not going to survive if I don't stop the bleeding!" Strange snarls, slicing into Steve's lower abdomen with practiced precision, hands glowing with faint blue magic as he tries to clot the torn vessels directly.

Steve lets out a low, pained moan — barely conscious. His hand twitches weakly on the sheet. His head rolls to the side, breath rasping, dry and thin.

"Stay with us, Steve," Bruce pleads, his hands shaking as he tries to keep an airway open. "You have to fight. For Tony. For Peter."

Strange plunges deeper, murmuring a spell under his breath, one designed for cellular repair, for miracles.

But nothing changes.

Steve's chest begins to rise in sharp, panicked bursts — and then stops altogether.

A long, flat tone begins to wail from the cardiac monitor.

"No. No, no, no," Bruce whispers.

Strange presses down hard on Steve's chest, magic crackling beneath his palms. "Come on, Captain. Come on."

Thirty compressions. Magic. A shock spell.
Nothing.

Another round. Blood bubbles at the corner of Steve's mouth. His body doesn't respond.

"Don't do this," Bruce says, his voice cracking. "Please don't—you need to meet your son."

Strange slows. His hands drop to his sides. His chest heaves once, then again.

He stares down at Steve's pale face, his eyes still barely open, lips parted in the suggestion of his final breath.

Bruce turns, eyes blurring with tears, and looks at the clock.

"Time of death…" He swallows, barely able to get the words out. "…3:42 a.m."

Strange doesn't move. Just stares down at the man they couldn't save.

Steve Rogers, the man who never gave up, is gone.

# Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

> Hey! I'm sorry this chapter is so short but I wanted to get something posted. I'm off today and had some time to write but I don't know when I'll get the chance again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The room is silent — all except for Strange, whose heavy breathing breaks the stillness. He stares at Steve's lifeless body, willing the serum to do something, *anything*. But Steve remains unmoving, skin ghost-pale, dark blood pooled around him.

He was dead.

Strange's mind drifts back to the first patient he ever lost — how it had gutted him, haunted him for years. If only he'd done more, she might still be alive.

And now, he's lost another.

But this wasn't just any patient. This was Steve Rogers. Captain America.

Only… right now, Steve wasn't the symbol. He wasn't a hero or an icon. He was just a man. A husband. A friend. A father. And the people who loved him were just outside the door, waiting — believing he'd be okay. Because Strange had promised them he would be.

And now that promise was broken.

"I'll tell Tony," Bruce murmurs from behind him.

Strange looks over. Bruce's expression is hollow, his voice weighted with sorrow. Tears cling to the corners of his eyes.

Tony would have to be told.

Strange would have to look him in the eye and admit he'd failed. That Steve was gone. That the life they'd built — the future they hoped for — was over.

Tony would become a widower. And Peter… their son would grow up without ever knowing Steve. No bedtime stories in that soft Brooklyn drawl. No dad to teach him to ride a bike or cheer from the sidelines.

Peter would never know how much his father loved him.

Strange can't let that happen.

“No,” Strange growls. “He’s not done yet.”

He grabs the defibrillator paddles, charges them, and shocks Steve once.

Steve’s body jerks violently, then goes still.

“Again!” Strange barks.

They shock him a second time. Still nothing.

Strange tosses the paddles aside. He begins chest compressions, fast and hard.

“One, two, three—come on, Rogers!” His hands press down rhythmically, desperately.

But on the fourth compression, there's a sudden, awful crack.

Bruce flinches. “Stephen—his rib—”

“I know,” Strange bites out, not stopping. “His heart's not beating!”

The crack echoes in his mind, but he doesn’t stop—can’t stop—not when Steve’s life is hanging by a thread.

“Breathe, dammit! Breathe!”

Steve’s chest barely rises beneath him. Strange doesn’t give up and continues his attempts to resuscitate Steve, doing his best to ignore the way the bones break under his fingers.

“Come on, soldier. You don’t get to quit now.”

Then a flicker. Faint. The monitor lets out a weak blip. Then another. And another.

Bruce rushes to check Steve’s vitals. “He’s back, but barely.”

“He won’t survive if he wakes,” Strange says, his chest heaving. “He’s too weak.”

“Then what—”

“I need to put him under.”

Strange moves quickly, his hands slick with blood, but his mind sharper than ever. Steve’s heart was beating — barely — but his body was failing fast. He wouldn't survive like this.

“There’s no time,” Strange mutters, more to himself than to Bruce. “If I put him under with standard methods, it’ll kill him.”

Bruce hesitates. “What are you going to do?”

“I’ll do it my way.”

Strange lifts his hands, fingers glowing with golden light, the familiar symbols of the Mystic Arts spiraling from his fingertips. His hands hover above Steve's chest, the magic pulsing in time with the faint rhythm of Steve's heart.

"I'm not letting you go, Rogers," he whispers.

The spell takes shape, wrapping around Steve's body in delicate threads of gold. The room seems to still, the beeping monitors softening as Steve's vitals stabilize. They're still weak, but steady.

"He's under," Strange says quietly. "The coma will hold. He's not out of danger, but… we bought him time."

---

The moment Tony enters the room, he's hit with the heartbreaking sight of Helen and her team of nurses desperately trying to get Peter to breathe. He stands frozen in the doorway, helpless, watching these incredible people fight for his son.

*Come on kiddo. Fight like hell*, Tony thinks to himself. His mind drifts to Steve, wondering what kind of state he's in. A part of him wants to return back to Steve's side. But Steve had asked him to stay with their son. So Tony does.

Peter looks so incredibly small under the harsh fluorescent lights, his tiny chest frighteningly still. Wires and tubes cover his body. A sharp pain shoots through Tony's chest. This wasn't supposed to have happened. Not to Peter.

Tony steps into the room, moving slowly, his legs feel too heavy. He doesn't speak, unsure of what to say. But Helen glances up at him and gives him a tight nod before returning her focus to Peter. It's the kind of look that says *we're doing everything we can, and you should prepare yourself*, all in one.

Tony doesn't want to prepare. His son needs to live. He doesn't care what Strange had said. Peter deserved to live.

He moves closer, just enough to see Peter's face beneath the oxygen mask. There's a faint tremble in his lips. Tony's heart leaps. Was that movement? But when nothing follows, his heart sinks.

He reaches out, gently brushing the tips of his fingers along Peter's arm — the only patch of skin not covered in medical tape or wires. His voice is rough, barely above a whisper.

"Hey, buddy. It's daddy. I'm right here."

There's no response.

Tony swallows hard. His legs shake, threatening to give out, but he doesn't let them.

"Come on, Pete.You've got your papa's stubbornness," he murmurs. "So use it now, okay? You fight. You fight, kiddo. We're not losing you. Not today."

A soft beep shifts in rhythm. Helen snaps her head up, eyes darting to the monitors. For a second, the room stills, everyone holding their breath.

Another beep. A stronger one.

Helen exhales shakily. “We’ve got rhythm. He’s trying.”

Tony lets out a sound between a sob and a laugh. “That’s it,” he whispers. “That’s my boy.”

The monitors continue to beep steadily now — not perfect, but present. Peter’s chest rises just barely under the mask. A flicker of breath. Life.

Tony leans his forehead against the glass of the incubator, eyes burning.

*Steve. You did it. He’s here. He’s fighting. Just like you.*

He swallows thickly, eyes never leaving Peter. “You just hang on, little man. I’ve got you. And I’ll get Papa, too. We’re gonna be okay, you hear me?”

Peter’s hand twitches.

Tony smiles weakly, tears running down his face. “Attaboy,” he whispers. “Just like that.”

Chapter End Notes

See? I’m not a bad person! This was the plan all along!

# Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

> I am so sorry for the late update. life has been crazy and I needed a break. But I missed writing and my stories, so I made time for it today. I hope this gets those creative juices flowing again! Thank you for being so patient and understanding.

Something was wrong.

Tony feels it like a punch to the chest — sharp, sudden, and impossible to ignore. There was no warning, no time to question it. Just that heavy, unmistakable sense of dread crawling up his spine. His heart starts to pound, each beat thudding in his ears, loud enough to drown everything else out — the steady beep of Peter's monitors, the soft murmur of Helen's voice, the shuffle of nurses' feet. It all fades away.

He looks down at Peter, at his tiny hand resting just beneath his own, so still, so small.

Helen's saying something — maybe reassurance, maybe an update — but her words don't register.

Something was wrong.

Not here.

Steve.

Tony's body moves before his mind can catch up. He pulls his hand back, swallowing hard, already stepping away from the incubator.

He needed to get out.

Tony gives his son one last look, memorizing every inch of him, the way his tiny chest rises just enough to count, the soft curl of his fingers. Then he glances up, locking eyes with Helen.

She meets his gaze immediately. There's no confusion in her expression, just steady understanding. She already knows.

"I've got him," she says firmly. "He's going to be okay. Go. I promise I'll find you if anything changes."

Tony swallows hard and nods, unable to speak. Then he turns and leaves the room.

The second he's in the hallway, his legs move on their own. Fast. Urgent. His feet pound the floor as he races through the corridor, toward the room where Steve is — where he should be okay, but Tony knows better. He feels it.

He reaches the door, skidding to a stop. His hand hovers just above the handle, trembling. His heart slams against his ribs, thudding so hard it feels like it might break through his chest.

Something's wrong.

Terribly wrong.

A voice in his head screams for him to go in. *Now!*

Tony pushes open the door. He stops dead in his tracks.

Crimson stains the once white sheets, soaking through the mattress, dripping to the floor in dark, sticky pools. It splashes across the tray of instruments. It's on Strange — his scrubs, his gloves, his sleeves. Even Bruce, usually so calm, is covered in it, from his arms to the front of his shirt.

But Tony doesn't see them for long.

Because then he sees the body on the bed.

Steve.

Lying death-still, his head tilted slightly to the side. His skin is pale —too pale— like all the warmth and color have been drained from him.

Tony's heart stutters.

He steps closer, slowly, afraid to break whatever fragile thing is holding Steve in place.

"Steve…" he whispers, voice cracking.

No answer.

He's hooked up to half a dozen machines, monitors beeping faintly in the background, barely keeping rhythm. Runes hover faintly in the air over his chest — magic, Tony realizes. Strange is using magic to keep him alive.

He turns, his eyes wild. "What happened?"

Strange doesn't look at him, not at first. He's focused on the glowing spell work, his jaw tight. "He flatlined. We brought him back."

Tony feels like the floor has dropped out from under him. "What?"

"We lost him for forty-two seconds," Bruce says quietly. "He crashed. Hemorrhaged. We stopped the bleeding, but he was too weak to survive if we brought him back fully."

“So you…”

“I bought him some time,” Strange says.

Tony stares at Steve, his hand hovering inches above his arm. He doesn’t dare touch him—not yet.

He blinks, tears blurring his vision. “You should’ve gotten me.”

“You were with Peter,” Bruce says gently.

Tony’s breath shudders out of him. He finally lowers himself into the chair beside the bed and reaches for Steve’s hand.

“Damn you,” he whispers, voice shaking. “You weren’t supposed to break your promise.”

Steve’s hand is warm, his skin soft, just like Tony remembers. His face is peaceful, too peaceful, like he’s only sleeping. Like he might wake up any second and flash that crooked smile and say something dumb and comforting.

But when Tony’s eyes drift lower, the truth hits him like a freight train.

Steve’s torso is wrapped hastily in soaked bandages, blood still seeping through in dark patches. The machine beside him beeps steadily, but it’s artificial. Forced. Magic or not, it isn’t Steve’s own heart keeping him alive.

Tony squeezes his hand tighter. “You weren’t supposed to leave me,” he chokes out. “Not you. Not now.”

Tony doesn’t let go. He can’t, too afraid that if he does, he’d crumble.

“He asked me to stay with Peter,” he murmurs. “Told me to look after our son. I should’ve—I should’ve been here. I should’ve known—”

A gentle hand lands on his shoulder. “Tony,” Bruce says softly, his voice barely holding together. “You were with your son. That’s what Steve wanted.”

Tony doesn’t look at him. His eyes stay locked on Steve’s motionless chest, searching for movement that doesn’t come. Just that damn mechanical rhythm.

“I don’t want to do this without him,” Tony says. “I can’t.”

Behind him, Strange exhales, slow and sharp. “He’s not gone,” he says. “Not yet.”

Tony lifts his head, blinking back tears. “What do you mean?”

Strange wipes his bloody gloves on a towel, shaking his head. “His body’s beyond repair. But the serum… it's still active. It’s trying to work. I’ve put him into a magically induced coma. It’s the only reason his heart is still beating.”

Tony looks back at Steve, his brows knitting in disbelief. “So what, he’s... on ice again?”

Strange hesitates. “It buys us time. But he’s not healing fast enough. He may not ever wake up.”

Tony’s jaw clenches. “Then you better figure out how to fix that. Because I'm not burying him.”

Bruce’s hand tightens on Tony’s shoulder, but Tony still can’t bring himself to look at him. He squeezes his eyes shut, trying to hold back the tears that threaten to spill. He knows once he’s alone that he won’t be able to conceal the pain he’s desperately trying to hold in.

Tony swallows hard and brings Steve’s hand up to his lips, kissing the soft skin–it reminds him of all the times when he’d take Steve's hand just like this. Steve would smile, growing bashful from the gesture. Tony would give anything to see that beautiful smile again.

“I need a minute,” Tony murmurs, the tears in his eyes already spilling.

He listens as Strange and Bruce quietly leave the room. The door clicks shut behind them, and only then does Tony let go.

A gut-wrenching sob tears from his throat, violent and unrestrained. He collapses forward, clutching Steve’s hand like a man clinging to a lifeline. His body shakes with the weight of everything he’s held back — the fear, the grief, the unbearable truth pressing down on his chest.

The pain hits hard, sharper than any wound he’s ever taken. Tony thought he knew loss. He’s buried friends, lost family, watched people he loved vanish right before his eyes. But this—this is different.

This is Steve.

And nothing has ever hurt like this.

# Chapter 31

Tony doesn't know how long he sits there. Time stops meaning anything. All he can focus on is the weight of Steve's hand in his, the soft beeping of the machines, and the occasional hitch of his breath.

His eyes sting from the tears that haven't stopped flowing. He gave up trying to conceal them a long time ago. Now his eyes are swollen and red. The image of Steve blurs every time new tears fill his eyes, and he quickly blinks to regain his vision. Nothing's changed.

Steve is still unresponsive.

Tony swallows hard and leans forward, the chair creaking from his weight. "Come on, Steve," he whispers, tears still falling down his face. "Baby, wake up. Please wake up."

But Steve remains lifeless, his body completely still and not showing signs of improvement. Strange had said the spell was to buy them some time—-allow Steve's body to rejuvenate, but it seems unlikely.

Tony releases a choked sob and lies his head on Steve's chest, his tears soaking through the thin fabric of the hospital gown. He keeps their fingers intertwined, hoping he'll feel Steve squeeze his hand.

"Honey, please?" Tony begs, his eyes squeezed shut. "I can't lose you. You promised."

Steve doesn't answer him. There's no sound or movement. Just the steady hum of the machines.

Tony's shoulders tremble as he clings to Steve's hand. "You're supposed to be here," he whispers against Steve's chest. "You're supposed to show him how to throw a punch or ride a bike. You're supposed to see him grow up. Come on, Steve. Don't give up. Not now. Please."

He sucks in a shuddering breath and lifts his head enough to look at Steve's face. "You didn't fight through ice, through every damn war to leave now. Not like this."

His sobs echo off the sterile walls. He continues to beg Steve and whatever god is listening to do something. Losing Steve had been his worst nightmare, a deep fear he never wanted to go through. And now he was losing the love of his life. It all could have been prevented if Steve would have just—

Tony tries not to finish that thought, but deep down, way deep down, he knows it's true. None of this would have happened if Steve didn't continue with the pregnancy. From the beginning it had been challenging, making him wonder if it was even all worth it.

Maybe Strange was right and his son was a threat. Peter was too strong. He was the one responsible for the decline of Steve's health. No matter how hard Steve tried to fight, he was

too weak. The serum that was meant to keep him going was being fed to their son. It wasn't fair.

Tony lifts his head when he hears the door open. He half expects Bruce or Helen, maybe even Strange, but then he sees Bucky and his heart nearly shatters at the broken expression on Bucky's face.

"He's not…" Bucky trails off, his eyes glossy with tears.

Tony doesn't even attempt to try and get up. It's like he's glued to the chair. All he wants to do is sit here and be ready in case Steve wakes up. But it's clear others need him as well. His mind drifts to his newborn son and the state he was in. Helen promised he was in good hands. Of course he was. He was the one meant to make it out of this.

"No," Tony finally finds his voice. "But just barely."

Bucky doesn't reply as he steps further into the room. He stands by Steve's side, blue eyes roaming over the machines and the trail of wires connecting Steve to them. He reaches for Steve's hand, his thumb smoothing over Steve's knuckles.

"What happened?" Bucky asks, his voice quiet, but Tony can still pick up the hurt in it.

Tony heaves out a sigh. He's not in the mood to talk about Steve's condition, especially around Steve's best friend. Bucky would probably blame him no matter what Tony says. And honestly, a part of him does blame himself for this. He should've been able to do more. For months he knew Steve was suffering and yet he never found a way to keep him alive.

Tony doesn't dare meet Bucky's eyes when he speaks, and he keeps his gaze on Steve's pale face. "There were complications with the birth. I wasn't there…Peter…he's not doing good either. I was with him. Strange and Bruce brought Steve back. Magic is what's keeping him alive."

"Brought him back? He…"

Tony looks up, regretting it immediately when he sees the gut-wrenching expression on Bucky's face. He really notices the tears now; it's hard not to when a few roll down Bucky's cheeks.

Bucky releases a shaky breath and carefully sits down on the bed beside Steve, careful not to interfere with the tubes and wires. "Hey, pal," he says, voice barely above a whisper. "You gotta wake up, okay? Everyone is waiting for you. Come on, Steve. You can't do this."

All Tony can do is helplessly watch as Bucky tries and fails to wake Steve up. For hours that's all Tony has been doing and nothing to show for it. Steve hasn't moved, not even a single finger has twitched. Tony wonders if Steve will ever wake up.

---

Tony jolts awake with a gasp. It takes him a good minute to realize he had fallen asleep and that he is still in Steve's room. He looks over at the bed, finding Steve in this same position.

But Bucky is gone.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

Tony turns and sees Natasha. She offers him a foam cup of coffee. “Thanks,” he mutters and accepts the drink. He only manages a few sips before giving up.

“Where’s Bucky?”

“Back home with Sam. I told him I’d check on you guys. So far nothing has changed,” Natasha says sadly, and she sits down in the chair next to Steve.

“How long was I asleep?”

“Two hours, give or take.”

That’s when Tony registers the crick in his neck. He rubs at the sore muscle and winces. “So no updates from Strange?” He asks.

“No. He came in thirty minutes ago—”

“And you didn’t think to wake me?” Tony snarls.

“You needed to sleep. Tony, you’ve been here all night.”

“So? I want round the clock updates. Jesus why is that so hard?”

Natasha doesn’t acknowledge his nasty tone. She turns away to look at Steve. “He’s going to wake up,” she says, but Tony can’t find it in himself to believe her.

“I hope so. So far—”

“Don’t,” she warns. “He will. He won’t give up after doing everything to make sure his son lived. By the way, your son is stable.”

“Oh.”

“That’s all you have to say?”

“What do you want me to say, Nat? That I’m happy he gets to live while Steve is on the brink of death? I fucking knew this was going to happen. If Steve would’ve just listened to me he’d be alive right now.”

“And your son? He deserves to die?”

Tony says nothing and turns away. He grabs Steve’s hand again, giving it a gentle squeeze. But he doesn’t get one in return.

“I think you should go see your son,” Natasha says. “I’ll stay with Steve.”

“I need to be here. If he wakes up—”

“Then I’ll find you. But be with Peter. He needs you, Tony. More than you know.”

Tony nods. Maybe she was right, but he’s still hesitant to leave Steve’s side.

He waits a couple more minutes, and when it becomes evident Steve wasn’t going to wake up, Tony slowly rises to his feet. He leans over Steve and kisses his forehead.

“I’ll be back, sweetheart. I’m going to see our son. I promise to tell you everything.”

# Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony watches through the large glass window as Helen and her small medical team monitor his son. Peter is crying, his tiny lungs producing a surprisingly loud sound despite Helen saying he had trouble breathing.

It must be the serum. That's the only thing Tony can think of.

It was working on Peter, restoring his body to perfect health.

And it wasn't fair.

Just down the hall, Steve is clinging to life, his body struggling to breathe and regain strength. The very serum that should be aiding him is failing, reversing its effects and bringing him to the brink of death.

Tony does everything he can to force the images of his husband's lifeless body out of his head. He squeezes his eyes shut, wishing he could see something else—anything else.

Peter's cries grow louder, causing Tony's eyes to snap open and settle on the screaming newborn. This time Helen catches his gaze and gestures with her head for him to enter the room. He hesitates for a moment, his eyes traveling back to his son, taking in his tiny body and the wires attached to his pink skin. With a shaky breath, he finally steps inside.

Steve would want him to.

He's instructed by the staff to wash up and slip on a gown. Once he's ready, his legs carry him toward his son. The nurses step aside, making room for him beside the incubator. Helen gently adjusts a wire before her eyes flicker up to Tony.

"You can touch him," Helen says. Tony looks up at her. "I think he wants you."

Tony turns his attention back to his son, his heart aching at the sight of him. He can hear Steve's voice in his head, urging Tony to be there for Peter. It's a promise Tony had made—and meant to keep.

He carefully slides his hand through the opening of the incubator, his fingers brushing against Peter's tiny hand. Peter continues to cry, the sound both heartbreaking and terrifying.

But it's also the push Tony needs. His son needed comfort, and only he could provide it.

"Hey, kiddo," Tony murmurs, his voice thick with emotion. Tears threaten to spill from his eyes, but he holds them back. He needs to be strong. "It's Daddy. I'm right here, Pete. It's okay."

Peter's cries begin to diminish, replaced with soft, tiny whimpers. He stretches his small limbs, though all Tony can see are the wires and tubes surrounding him.

It wasn't fair that he had been born with complications. Their son was supposed to be healthy and okay, yet he was struggling just to live.

"He's doing better," Helen says softly, almost as if she can hear Tony's thoughts.

Tony looks up at her, his eyes shining with unshed tears.

"He's going to be fine, Tony."

Tony swallows hard and looks away, settling his attention back on Peter. He gently strokes his hand with his finger.

"The serum is working then," Tony finally says, his voice tight.

He doesn't mean to sound angry. It wasn't Peter's fault.

"I'm not sure," Helen answers honestly. "It's a possibility. We haven't tested him—"

"Don't," Tony interrupts quickly. "This poor kid has gone through enough. Just leave him alone. Steve would want that."

Helen nods. "He's going to be okay. Steve's strong."

Her words do little to comfort him. He wants to believe Steve will overcome this—that his strength will return and he'll wake up.

But the images of Steve's lifeless body strapped to the bed still linger in his mind.

A reminder that he might never wake up again.

---

Tony eventually makes it back to Steve's side. He isn't surprised to still find him unresponsive.

Natasha is still there, but she's not alone this time. Bucky and Sam stand nearby, both of them obviously grieving. Sam appears the strongest, but Tony knows what a broken man looks like.

Bruce is there as well, monitoring Steve's vitals. When he catches Tony's gaze, he solemnly shakes his head.

Tony's heart sinks.

Steve wasn't improving.

Before Bruce leaves the room, he places a hand on Tony's shoulder and gently squeezes it. It takes everything Tony has not to break down right then and there.

"I'm sorry I don't have better news," Bruce says softly. "I'll keep you updated."

"Thank you," Tony manages.

"How's your son? I was about to check on him."

"Helen says he's okay. He's alive and breathing, so…"

Bruce releases a sad sigh, glancing over his shoulder at Steve. "I'm so sorry, Tony. I'm doing everything I can."

"I know you are," Tony says quietly. Their eyes meet again.

"Thanks, buddy."

Bruce nods before leaving the room.

Natasha rises from her chair, giving Tony space to take her place. He quietly thanks her and sits down, preparing himself for another long and lonely night.

"We'll give you some time," Natasha says, gesturing for Sam and Bucky to follow her. "Let us know if you need anything."

Tony simply nods.

Once they've cleared out and it's just him, the emotions he's been holding back finally spill over. He grips Steve's hand as sobs rack through his body.

"Hey, honey," Tony whispers, his voice shaking. "I saw Pete today. He's doing good. Helen said he's fine, and now he's breathing better."

Tony tightens his grip on Steve's hand.

"I know you'd want to see him. So please, Steve… wake up. He needs you. I need you."

Tony waits.

A small part of him hopes Steve will wake up and answer him. Tell him everything will be okay. Tell him he wants to meet their son.

But Steve doesn't speak. He doesn't move—except for the soft rise and fall of his chest as the magic surrounding him breathes for him.

Tony releases a broken sob and lowers his head beside Steve's arm, his tears soaking into the thin sheets covering Steve's body. He's so lost in his grief that he doesn't hear the door open.

It's only when he feels a hand rest gently on his shoulder that he realizes he's no longer alone.

He looks up to find Pepper staring down at him, her expression full of sorrow.

Tony tries not to crumble, but it's impossible. "Pep," he croaks, tears streaming down his face.

She doesn't hesitate to wrap her arms around him.

"I'm sorry, Tony," she murmurs.

But the condolences do little to ease the pain. The only thing that could save him from it would be Steve coming back to him.

Nothing is said between them, but Tony finds comfort in her presence.

She sits beside him, one hand resting on his shoulder. He hunches forward, needing to be closer to Steve. Her hand drifts down to his back, rubbing slow, soothing circles.

He chokes back another sob.

"It's not fair," he murmurs. "He wanted a family, and now he's not even here."

"He's still here," Pepper says softly.

"You know what I mean. He didn't even get a chance to hold our son."

The bitterness in Tony's voice doesn't go unnoticed. Her hand squeezes his shoulder.

Tony suddenly sits up, forcing her hand away as he angrily wipes his eyes.

"It's not fair," he repeats.

"Tony, you didn't know this was going to happen."

"Didn't I?" he snaps. "We all knew how this was affecting him. I tried to stop it—to make things easier for him—and I failed. He's dying because of me."

Pepper doesn't flinch at his outburst.

She remains seated, her expression full of quiet sorrow. "Tony," she says gently, "look at me."

He doesn't want to. He keeps his gaze fixed on the floor, his chest heaving as he struggles to control his breathing.

"Tony."

Reluctantly, he lifts his head.

Pepper's eyes are soft, but there's a quiet strength in them that has always managed to steady him, even when everything else feels like it's falling apart.

"You didn't do this to him," she says.

Tony lets out a bitter laugh, dragging a hand over his face.

"If you hadn't pushed," Pepper continues. "Steve might not even be alive right now."

Tony shakes his head, pacing a few steps away from the bed before turning to face her. "He trusted me. He trusted that I knew what I was doing. And now he's lying there—"

His voice breaks.

Pepper stands and walks over to him. She places a hand over his shoulder, grounding him.

"He's lying there because he loves you," she says quietly. "Because he loves his son."

"He doesn't even know Peter," Tony whispers, eyes bright with tears.

Pepper glances at Steve's still form, then back to Tony. "Then tell him."

"What?"

"Talk to him," she says. "You think Steve would miss the chance to hear about his kid? Even if he can't answer, you know he'd want to know everything."

Tony looks back at Steve.

The steady rhythm of the machines fills the room. Steve lies motionless, pale against the hospital sheets, looking smaller somehow without his usual strength behind him.

Tony swallows hard.

"I told him a little," he admits quietly. "About Peter breathing better."

Pepper gives a small nod. "Then keep talking," she says. "Tell him everything. Tell him how loud Peter cries. Tell him how stubborn he already is." A faint smile touches her lips. "Sounds like someone we know."

Tony lets out a shaky breath, some of the tightness in his chest easing just slightly.

Pepper squeezes his arm.

"You're not alone in this," she says. "You have people who love you. And Steve… Steve isn't done fighting yet."

Tony looks down at Steve again. For a moment, he just watches the slow rise and fall of his chest.

"I really hope you're right," he murmurs.

Pepper gives his arm one last squeeze before stepping back toward the door.

“I am,” she says softly. “And Tony?”

He glances up.

“Steve would be proud of you. For Peter.”

Tony doesn’t answer right away.

He simply returns to the chair beside the bed and takes Steve’s hand again, holding it carefully between both of his.

Pepper watches for a moment longer before quietly slipping out of the room, leaving Tony alone with the man he refuses to give up on.

Tony leans closer, his thumb brushing over Steve’s knuckles.

“You hear that, sweetheart?” he murmurs hoarsely. “Apparently you’ve got a stubborn kid waiting to meet you.”

His voice softens.

“So you better wake up.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to have some more Tony and Peter bonding. And Bucky needs to meet Peter.

Thank you for reading!

# Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony jolts awake at the sound of the door opening.

Bruce steps inside, offering him a small, tired smile before moving toward Steve's bedside to check his vitals. Tony straightens in the chair, wincing as the muscles in his back protest after a night of sleeping upright.

He ignores it.

All of his attention is already back on Steve.

Tony watches as Bruce inputs data into the StarkPad, the soft tapping filling the otherwise quiet room. He wants to ask when will he wake up but the question dies before it can reach his lips.

He already knows the answer.

Steve wasn't improving.

"Still no change," Bruce says with a quiet sigh. He hesitates for a moment before adding, "Strange wants to come in today. Talk with you… if you're up for it."

Tony lets out a humorless breath. "Doesn't sound like I have much of a choice."

He scoots closer, taking Steve's hand in his. His grip is careful, like Steve might break if he holds on too tightly.

"Why aren't you waking up?" he whispers.

Nothing.

Not even the slightest twitch.

Steve remains completely still.

Bruce shifts beside him, glancing between Tony and the monitors before forcing himself to speak again.

"How's Peter?"

Tony looks up briefly, then back down at Steve. His thumb drags slowly over Steve's knuckles, over and over, like he's trying to memorize the shape of them.

"He's okay," Tony murmurs. "Breathing better. Stronger."

There’s a pause.

“I was going to check on him.”

“I think you should,” Bruce says gently.

Tony doesn’t miss the tone.

He looks up again, narrowing his eyes slightly.  “What?”

Bruce exhales, running a hand through his hair. “You’re a wreck, Tony.”

Tony huffs out a dry laugh. “Wow. It doesn’t take a genius to realize that.”

“No,” Bruce says softly. “Just a friend.” He studies him for a second. “When was the last time you showered? Slept in your own bed?”

“I’m not going home,” Tony snaps. His grip tightens around Steve’s hand. “Not until he goes with me.”

“Tony…” Bruce’s voice softens even more “We’re doing everything we can down here. You should sleep.”

“I’ll sleep when I’m dead.”

“I’ll be back later,” Bruce says softly.

Tony doesn’t respond.

Bruce lingers for half a second longer, then turns and quietly leaves the room.

Silence settles in again.

Tony leans forward, elbows resting on the edge of the bed, still holding Steve’s hand like it’s the only thing keeping him grounded.

He keeps talking.

About Peter. About the way he cries. About how small he is. About how Steve’s missing everything.

He talks until his voice starts to wear thin.

But nothing changes.

No movement.

No response.

No sign that Steve can hear him at all.

Eventually, the silence becomes too heavy to sit in.

Tony exhales shakily and pushes himself to his feet.

He can go see Peter. Bring something back. Something new to tell Steve.

Something that might *finally* reach him.

“I’ll be back,” he murmurs.

He leans down, pressing a soft kiss to Steve’s lips.

He lingers there for just a second longer than he should, like he’s waiting for something, *anything* to happen.

But like some cruel, twisted fairytale…Steve doesn’t wake.

Tony pulls back slowly, his chest tightening. He knew it wouldn’t be that easy.

Still… a part of him had hoped.

He brushes his thumb once more over Steve’s hand before letting go, the absence of contact immediate and jarring.

“Don’t go anywhere,” he whispers.

Then he turns and walks out of the room

---

Tony is surprised to find that Peter already has a guest. Bucky is sitting in a chair he’s pulled up against the incubator, one hand inside and gently stroking Peter’s tiny arm as he talks softly to him. For a moment, Tony lingers in the doorway, not wanting to interrupt the tender interaction.

He can barely make out what Bucky is saying—the room is still too loud due to the constant beeping of the machines. But he’s able to pick up a few words.

“You’re strong, kid. Just like your papa. He’s the strongest man I know.”

Peter lets out a soft, restless sound, his small body shifting beneath the wires. Bucky immediately stills his hand, then resumes the motion more carefully, like he’s afraid of doing something wrong.

“You just hang in there, alright?” he continues quietly. “He’s fighting too. That’s what Steve does. He fights.”

Tony’s throat tightens.

He finally steps inside.

Bucky glances up at the movement, his expression softening when he sees Tony.

“Hey,” he says quietly.

Tony nods once, stepping closer to the incubator. His eyes immediately fall to Peter, taking in the small rise and fall of his chest.

“Hey,” Tony echoes, his voice rough.

For a second, neither of them says anything.

Then Bucky looks back down at Peter, his hand still resting lightly against him.

“He likes when someone’s talking,” Bucky says. “Calms him down.”

Tony watches as Peter’s tiny fingers twitch, his face scrunching slightly before relaxing again.

“Yeah,” Tony murmurs. “He’s… loud.”

A faint smile flickers across Bucky’s face.
“Yeah. Definitely Steve’s kid.”

That almost breaks him.

Tony swallows hard and steps closer, resting his hand against the edge of the incubator. He watches Bucky’s hand for a moment before slowly reaching in himself, brushing his finger against Peter’s other hand.

Peter’s reaction is immediate, his tiny fingers curl weakly around Tony’s.

Tony exhales shakily.

“Hey, Pete,” he whispers. “It’s me again.”

Bucky shifts slightly in his chair, giving Tony more space without fully pulling away.

“He’s got a grip,” Bucky says softly.

Tony lets out a quiet, breathless huff. “Yeah… yeah, he does.”

His gaze lingers on Peter, but his thoughts drift.

“He should be here for this,” Tony says after a moment, barely above a whisper.

Bucky goes still.

Tony shakes his head slightly, his thumb brushing over Peter's hand. "He hasn't even met him yet," he adds, his voice tightening."Not even once."

Bucky's jaw clenches, but he keeps his voice steady. "He will."

"Bruce said Strange wants to talk to me today," Tony says quietly.

Bucky's brows pull together slightly. "About what?"

Tony lets out a slow breath. "I don't know," he admits. "But it didn't sound good."

Silence settles between them again, heavier this time.

Peter lets out another small noise, his grip tightening faintly around Tony's finger.

Bucky looks down at him, something soft and almost protective flickering in his expression.

"He knows you're here," Bucky says. "Kid's not alone."

Tony nods faintly, though his eyes sting. "Yeah," he whispers.

---

Tony eventually makes it back to Steve's room. He notices the vase of flowers on the bedside table. He inspects the note to find it's from Nick and he can't help but huff out a small laugh.

"Guess Nick is soft afterall," he says softly to himself. Then he turns to face Steve and holds up the note. "Honey, Nick sent you flowers. Or do you think Maria did it and signed his name?"

He laughs again, only for it to die down when he remembers Steve can't laugh at his dumb jokes. Steve would give him a hard time after one to many cringy jokes. But sometimes Tony would be able to get a laugh out of him.

What he'd wish to have that right now.

Tony sets the note down beside the flowers, then he moves toward Steve, taking his spot in the chair that has become his home.

He takes Steve's hand and softly runs his thumb over Steve's knuckles, occasionally circling the gold band on his finger. "I saw Pete again today. Bucky was with him. They seem to be getting along pretty well."

There's no response. Tony knew there wouldn't be, but it doesn't stop him from continuing to talk and hoping Steve would find the strength to wake up.

“When you wake up, because I know you will, I’m giving you a hard time about this. First sleeping for almost seventy years and now this? If you wanted a nap you could’ve just told me.”

Tears begin to gather in Tony’s eyes. His usual way of comfort isn’t working anymore. He used to hide behind his jokes and witty comments, but now he felt like his hiding place was failing.

He wouldn’t reach for the bottle. He promised he’d give it up no matter how difficult life would become. His son needed him sober and around, not drunk and absent like the man Tony had to deal with growing up.

“Please promise you’ll wake up,” Tony begs, his voice laced with hurt. “I can’t do this. I’m trying, believe me I am. But…I can’t. Not without you.”

A knock on the door startles him and he jumps, his hand slipping from Steve’s. Strange appears in the doorway, his presence only makes Tony feel worse.

“Stark,” Strange says, his expression calm but not reassuring. “Let’s talk outside.”

Tony nods and follows after him. They end up in an empty consultation room, away from any unwanted distractions or nosey staff.

Tony appreciates the privacy. The press doesn’t know what’s currently happening with Steve, and Tony intends to keep it that way. The last thing he needs is the press bombarding him with questions about his sick son and husband.

Strange remains closest to the door while Tony paces once, then stops, his arms crossed tightly around his chest.

“Alright,” he says. “Talk.”

Strange says nothing at first, almost as if he’s choosing his words carefully.

“The spell I placed on Steve is functioning like it’s intended.”

Tony frowns. “Funny. It seems like it’s not doing a damn thing.”

“It’s keeping him alive. Stabilizing his vital functions and preventing further deterioration.”

“So he’s stable. Fantasic. When does he wake up?”

There’s no response. And that sets Tony on edge.

“What?” He presses.

“The spell is sustaining his body,” Strange replies slowly. “But it does not restore what’s been lost.”

Tony’s jaw tightens. “Speak English.”

“The serum is unstable. His body is caught between states.”

“And we tried to fix it. Can we do more tests? I hate to say it but if the Hydra serum—”

“No,” Strange says sternly. “That made it worse.”

“So what then? This spell is supposed to help him.”

“And it is. It’s keeping his body functioning. But his consciousness may not return.”

Those words hit like a physical blow.

Tony stares at him. “No,” he says immediately. “No that’s not—he’s in a coma. People wake up from comas all the time.”

“This is not a typical coma.”

Tony shakes his head, pacing again, faster now.

“So what—you’re saying your magic isn’t strong enough? Because I can get you more power, I can build something, I can—”

“This is not a matter of strength,” Strange interrupts.

Tony stops.

“The spell is doing exactly what it was designed to do,” Strange continues. “But it cannot make him wake.”

Tony’s voice drops, quieter now. Dangerous. “So what are you saying?”

Strange meets his eyes. “I do not believe Steve will regain consciousness under the current conditions.”

Tony just stares at him. For a second, it looks like he didn’t hear it.

“No. You’re wrong.”

Strange doesn’t respond.

Tony lets out a breath that almost turns into a laugh, dragging a hand through his hair.

“You’ve been wrong before,” he mutters. “This isn’t—this isn’t one of your ‘we looked into millions of futures’ things, alright? This is my husband.”

“I understand that.”

“No, you don’t!” Tony snaps, his voice rising. “Because if you did, you wouldn’t be standing there telling me he’s just… what? Gone? Trapped? What does that even mean?”

Strange's expression softens slightly. "It means he may not be able to find his way back," he says.

Tony turns away, bracing his hands against the edge of the table, his shoulders tense.

"So fix it," he says hoarsely. "You're a wizard, right? Fix it."

Strange is quiet for a moment. "There may be… another option."

Tony stills. Slowly, he turns back. "What kind of option?"

Strange hesitates. "The spell could be altered," he says. "Weakened. Possibly removed."

Tony's stomach drops. "And?"

Strange holds his gaze. "If the spell is what is sustaining him, removing it would force his body to function on its own."

Tony's voice is barely above a whisper now. "And if it can't?"

Strange doesn't sugarcoat it. "Then he will die."

Tony collapses into the nearest chair, a choked sob tearing from his chest before he can stop it. He shakes his head, over and over, like he can physically force the words away.

No.

No, that wasn't possible.

Steve couldn't die.

He promised he wouldn't.

"No," Tony breathes, his voice breaking. "There has to be something else."

"I'm sorry," Strange says quietly. "There's nothing else I can do."

Tony looks up at him, his vision blurred with tears, his eyes red and glassy.

"Then what can I do?" he demands, desperation bleeding into every word.

Strange holds his gaze, and for the first time, there's something heavier behind his calm—something that almost looks like regret.

"There is… another option," he says carefully.

Tony stills.

"There is the option of letting him go. I can remove the spell. The machines can be turned off." His voice softens slightly. "We can make him comfortable."

The words settle into the room like a weight.

Tony just stares at him.

For a moment, he doesn't react at all, like his mind refuses to process what was just said.

"No."It's barely a whisper. "No, we're not doing that."

He pushes himself up from the chair too quickly, nearly stumbling before catching himself on the edge of the table.

"You don't get to say that like it's some kind of option!" Tony snaps. "That's not an option. That's—" He cuts himself off, shaking his head again. "No. No, absolutely not."

Strange doesn't argue.

"I am not telling you what to choose," he says evenly. "Only what is possible."

Tony laughs, but there's no humor in it—just something sharp and broken.

"Yeah? Well, here's what's possible," he says, pointing toward the door. "He wakes up. That's the option. That's the only one I'm interested in."

Strange watches him carefully."You may not have that choice," he says quietly.

Tony's breath stutters. His hand drops slowly to his side. For the first time, there's hesitation. Fear.

"No," he says again, but it's weaker now. "You're wrong."

Strange says nothing.

"He's strong," Tony mutters. "You said it yourself—everyone says it. He's survived worse than this."

"Yes," Strange agrees. "But even the strongest can only fight for so long."

Tony stops.

The room feels too small. Too quiet.

"I'm not… I'm not making that call," he says finally, his voice low and unsteady. "I'm not the one who decides when he dies."

Strange's expression softens just slightly."You are his husband," he says. "If the time comes… it will be your decision."

Tony shakes his head immediately. "No," he repeats, backing away like he's trying to put distance between himself and the words. "No, I'm not doing that. I won't."

Strange inclines his head, accepting that. For now.

“I will give you time,” he says.

Tony doesn’t answer.

He’s already turning toward the door, like he needs to see Steve *now*, like if he gets back to him fast enough, he can undo everything he just heard.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the angst! I swear this won’t end sad!

# Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing Steve becomes aware of is the darkness. One minute he was awake and talking to Bruce and Strange, then, unable to fight the exhaustion, he closed his eyes and became enveloped in the dark.

It wasn't scary.

If anything, he found it peaceful.

It was quiet—as if all the sounds around him had simply stopped existing. No machines. No voices. No pain.

Just silence.

For the first time in a long time, his body didn't hurt. There was no more pain, no struggling to get air into lungs. Every ache that tormented him for months was gone.

There was just peace, something he hadn't felt in a long time.

He lets himself drift deeper into the quiet. His thoughts grow slower and quieter. He can't even remember what he had been holding onto.

Steve isn't sure where he's going or where he is for that matter, but he keeps moving. It's not until something breaks the silence.

A sound.

It's faint at first. So faint he almost believes he imagined it. But it gets louder with every step until he recognizes the sound.

Music.

Steve's brows furrow as the soft crackle of a familiar tune drifts through the darkness. Old and warm; the kind of music that reminds him of tiny Brooklyn apartments and crowded dance halls.

His mother used to hum songs just like it while cooking dinner. Her blonde hair neatly tied up in a bun and a faded apron wrapped around her waist. Despite the many hardships she faced, she rarely let it show. Steve only remembered her happiness and fearlessness.

The darkness around him shifts, like a fog beginning to clear.

Light slowly spills in, a warm glow replacing endless black. Shapes start to form around him, blurry at first, then sharper the closer he looks at them.

A dance hall forms, transporting him back in time. A time when the world was simpler, when he felt like he belonged. He watches as people dance to the upbeat tune, a mixture of conversation and laughter filling the space.

Steve looks down at himself instinctively, almost expecting to see the frail, tiny body he'd once drag through the streets of Brooklyn.

But he was still himself. Still tall and broad-shouldered. Strong.

Still Steve.

The swell of his belly was gone, almost as if it never existed. He places a hand over his stomach, his brows crinkling in confusion. Then it all starts to come back to him.

He had given birth. His son was finally here.

But when Steve looks around again, he realizes the people he's come to love aren't in this place.

"Steve?"

Steve freezes at the familiar voice.

Slowly, he turns around, his breath catching in his throat when he sees Peggy.

She looks as beautiful as ever in a red dress. Her hair is perfectly styled, makeup carefully done, the shade of her lipstick matching the deep red fabric.

"Peggy?" Steve whispers.

She smiles softly and steps closer, her heels clicking gently against the floor. For a moment, neither of them says anything. The music continues to play around them while couples sway across the dance floor.

Steve is at a complete loss for words.

This couldn't be real.

It had to be a dream.

Then Peggy reaches for his hand and gently pulls him toward the dance floor. The warmth and pressure of her hand in his feels familiar.

Real.

Too real.

"You owe me a dance," Peggy says as she places one of Steve's hands against her waist.

Steve lets out a quiet breath. "I'm sorry, Peggy. I—"

“It’s okay,” she interrupts gently.

They begin to sway together with the music. Steve doesn’t even have to look down at his feet anymore. The dance lessons he took before his wedding made sure of that.

“Not bad,” Peggy says with a teasing smile. “Where did you learn to dance?”

Steve huffs out a quiet laugh. “Practice, I guess. I didn’t want to step on Tony’s feet.”

The memory of that night immediately floods back to him—Tony smiling at him beneath soft lights, laughing every time Steve missed a step.

Peggy hums softly. “Tony’s a good man. Though I suppose the last time I saw him, he was still a little boy.”

Steve can’t help smiling at the thought. “He’s amazing, Peg.”

They dance a little longer, and for a while Steve stops questioning where he is or why he’s there. It’s easy to lose himself in the familiarity of it all—in the music, the warmth, the past.

A part of him hadn’t realized how much he missed it.

How much he missed *them*.

He never truly got the chance to grieve everything he lost.

“You’re not supposed to be here,” Peggy says softly, cutting through his thoughts.

Steve’s smile fades slightly. “I don’t even know where ‘here’ is,” he admits. “I think… maybe I’m dreaming.”

Peggy studies him quietly. “Is it a good dream?”

Steve glances around the room, at the strangers dancing around them, before looking back down at Peggy.

“Yeah,” he answers softly. “All the pain… it’s gone.”

Something sad flickers across Peggy’s expression. “You have to go back, Steve.”

His brow furrows. “Why? I feel like I belong here.”

“But you don’t. At least not yet,” Peggy says gently. Her hand squeezes his lightly. “Tony needs you.”

---

Tony stands outside Steve’s room, watching through the large glass window as Bucky and Sam attempt to wake him.

Natasha had been there earlier, but once Bucky arrived, she slipped out, saying she was going to visit Peter for a while.

Tony knows he should go see his son too.

But right now, all he can think about is the man lying motionless in that bed and how desperately he wants him to wake up.

His thoughts drift back to the conversation he had with Strange a few days ago. The only real option they had was to release the spell and hope Steve's body was strong enough to survive on its own.

It was risky.

Steve could still be too weak. His body could fail the second the magic let go.

Pulling the plug wasn't an option.

It never would be.

Steve needed to wake up from this. He needed to come back to the people who loved him.

Peter especially needed him more than anyone.

Footsteps sound behind him before someone stops at his side. For a second Tony expects Strange—or maybe Bruce—but then a hand settles on his shoulder, squeezing lightly.

Tony turns toward him and nearly crumbles at the sight of his best friend.

Rhodey offers him a small, sympathetic smile.

It doesn't make the pain disappear, but his presence helps. Right now, Tony needs that more than anything.

"Any changes?" Rhodey asks quietly.

Tony shakes his head.

He'd managed to leave Rhodey a few voicemails about Steve over the last few weeks, though he never expected him to show up so quickly. Rhodey was busy. Important. But just like always, he still came.

Rhodey always came when Tony needed him.

"No," Tony says, his voice rough from exhaustion and too many sleepless nights.

He's lost count of how many times he's cried. Showing emotion had never come easily to him. Not before Steve.

Steve had taught him it was okay to feel things. Okay to stop hiding every emotion behind sarcasm and anger.

And now Steve wasn't even awake to see what he'd done to him.

"He'll get through this," Rhodey says. "How many times has Steve been knocked down and gotten back up again?"

Tony lets out a weak, humorless laugh.

"It's different this time." His eyes drift back toward the room. "Strange doesn't think there's any hope. He thinks…" Tony swallows hard. "He thinks I should let him go."

Rhodey's expression falls instantly. "Tony… I'm sorry."

The words hit like sandpaper against already raw skin.

Everyone is sorry.

Everyone feels bad for him. For Peter.

But nobody has answers.

Nobody can fix this.

And that's what Tony wants—not pity.

He wants someone to do something.

That includes himself.

He's one of the smartest people on the planet, yet he still can't figure out how to save the one person who matters most to him.

Fixing things has always been his purpose.

He tried to fix Stark Industries after learning what his weapons were doing to the world. He tried to fix the world itself with technology and armor and endless sleepless nights spent inventing solutions to problems no one else could solve.

And now he's trying to fix the man he loves.

But for the first time in a very long time…

Tony doesn't know how.

"How's your son?" Rhodey asks, pulling Tony's attention away from the window.

Tony glances at him briefly before looking back at Steve. Somehow, the ache in his chest only deepens.

"Good," he says quietly. "Kiddo's breathing on his own now. Eating okay too. Helen said he might be able to come home tomorrow."

“That’s great news.”

“Is it?” Tony laughs bitterly. “Peter gets to come home, and Steve doesn’t.”

He finally turns toward Rhodey, his expression crumbling around the edges.

“It’s not fair. Steve’s supposed to be here for all of this. This is what he wanted—what he fought so damn hard for.” His voice shakes. “It’s a sick fucking joke. He’s losing everything for nothing.”

“Not for nothing,” Rhodey says gently. “Peter’s here. Your son is alive. That’s what Steve wanted. You know he’d make sure of that.”

Tears sting Tony’s eyes, but he forces them back. He needs to stay strong. But every day, the fight gets harder, and he’s starting to wonder how much longer he can keep doing this.

“Tony?”

Bruce approaches slowly.

For one brief, stupid second, hope sparks in Tony’s chest. Maybe Bruce has news. Maybe something changed.

Then Tony notices the clipboard tucked against Bruce’s side.

Paperwork.

His stomach drops.

“What’s that?” Tony asks quietly.

Bruce glances down at it before looking back up, visibly hesitant.

“Bruce…”

Bruce sighs heavily. “Strange wants you to sign—”

“I’m not signing anything,” Tony snaps immediately.

“Tony, he just wants you to have it in case you decide—”

“Tell him to shove it up his magical ass.”

“Tony…”

Frustration boils over. Tony yanks the clipboard from Bruce’s hands hard enough to wrinkle the papers.

His eyes skim over the forms before landing on the line waiting for his signature.

One signature. That’s all it would take.

A single tear slips free before Tony angrily wipes it away with his sleeve.

Without another word, he pushes past them and enters Steve's room. Even if Steve can't comfort him the way he usually does, Tony still needs to be near him.

He sinks into the familiar chair beside the bed and immediately takes Steve's hand in his own.

Across the room, Bucky and Sam exchange a glance but thankfully stay quiet.

The silence stretches between them, broken only by the steady hum of machines and the soft magical crackle surrounding Steve.

Tony gently strokes his thumb over Steve's knuckles while gripping the clipboard tightly in his other hand.

"Honey… you gotta wake up," he whispers brokenly. "Please."

"I was talking to him earlier," Bucky says quietly.

Tony looks over. Bucky's eyes are red, his expression wrecked in a way Tony's never seen before.

"Told him stories about when we were kids," Bucky continues, his voice wavering. "Even talked about his ma." He lets out a shaky breath. "Punk still won't wake up."

A soft sob escapes him before Sam steps closer, resting a steady hand on his shoulder.

"It's okay, Buck," Sam murmurs.

Tony lowers his head slightly.

No. Nothing about this was okay. Steve still wasn't waking up no matter how desperately they begged him to.

His eyes drift back down to the paperwork. All he had to do was sign and Strange would remove the spell. Steve could finally rest.

No more pain.

No more suffering.

Just peace.

"What's that?" Sam asks quietly, gesturing toward the clipboard.

Tony doesn't answer right away.

He still can't fully process the idea that he's being asked to decide whether Steve lives or dies.

“Strange thinks I should sign it,” Tony finally says hoarsely. “Steve’s not making progress, so…”

“Don’t.”

The word comes out sharp enough to make Tony look up immediately.

Bucky’s jaw is clenched tightly. “You can’t give up on him.”

“You think I want to?” Tony shoots back. “You think any of this is easy for me?”

“I know it’s not.” Bucky says, emotion breaking through his voice now. “But Steve means something to me too. To all of us. I’m not ready to lose him.”

“Buck,” Sam says carefully. “We also have to think about the quality of life he’d have. Trapped in this bed… you think Steve would want that?”

Bucky immediately shrugs off Sam’s hand and stands.

“You’re giving up on him too?” he snaps. “After all the times he’s been there for you?”

“No,” Sam says firmly. “But if letting him go is the best thing for him—”

“It’s not!” The shout echoes through the room.

Bucky turns toward Tony, his eyes glassy with tears. “He wouldn’t give up on any of us,” he says, voice cracking. “He had every reason to give up on me, and he didn’t. So I’m not giving up on him.”

Before anyone can respond, Bucky storms out of the room.

The door slams shut behind him.

Chapter End Notes

I feel so bad for all of them! 😭 even if I am the one causing it 😜

I think I’ll make Steve wake up in the next chapter. The man has slept enough!

Thank you for reading ❤️

# Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rogers!”

Steve follows the familiar voice until his eyes land on a table a few feet away. He recognizes them immediately. He’d know them anywhere.

Dum Dum is waving him over, a grin stretching beneath his mustache. Gabe is laughing at something Jim Morita said, while Falsworth is already motioning for Steve to hurry up.

For a moment, Steve can only stare.

The Howling Commandos. His friends. His family.

People he’d spent years missing.

It doesn’t take long for the rest of them to notice him. Soon they’re all waving him over, calling his name.

Peggy steps aside and offers him a knowing smile before turning away.

“Peg—”

Steve starts after her, but she disappears into the crowd of dancers and patrons before he can reach her.

For a second he considers following, then Dum Dum cups his hands around his mouth.

“Quit standin’ around lookin’ confused and get over here, Rogers!”

Laughter erupts from the table. Warm, familiar laughter. The sound hits Steve harder than he expects.

His chest tightens, and suddenly he’s smiling.

Shaking his head, he makes his way toward them.

“Still bossy after all these years, huh?” Steve calls back.

“Somebody’s gotta keep you in line,” Gabe shoots back.

“Lord knows Barnes ain’t here to do it.”

The group laughs again.

And for the first time since arriving in this strange place, Steve finds himself laughing too.

“How is Barnes?” Dum Dum asks once Steve is seated with them.

“He’s good.” Steve can’t help but smile at the thought of Bucky finally being happy. “He’s married.”

That gets a reaction out of the Howlies and they all start laughing, but Steve knows they’re genuinely happy for Bucky. If only they could see him now. If only Bucky was here to see them.

But Steve doesn’t linger on that thought for long. Whenever ‘here’ is, it’s clearly not Bucky’s time.

And perhaps it’s not Steve’s either. Peggy had said it herself. But there was something about this place that made Steve feel this was where he was meant to be. Everyone he’s lost is here. They’ve been waiting for him.

Now he’s with them again.

“I’m surprised Barnes settled down. He was always chasing after pretty dames,” Jim says, earning another laugh from the group.

Steve smiles. “You should see him now,” he says. “He married a great guy. Pretty sure kids are in the near future.”

“Kids?” Gabe repeats.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Dum Dum mutters. Then his eyes notice the gold ring on Steve’s finger. “Looks like Barnes wasn’t the only one to get hitched. Who’s the lucky girl?”

Steve’s face heats up. “No girl.”

The table goes quiet.

Then Dum Dum’s eyes widen. “Oh.”

The Howlies exchange looks before Falsworth shrugs. “Well, that certainly explains why he never had much luck with them.”

“Hey!” Steve protests. The table erupts again. Steve rolls his eyes.“His name’s Tony.”

That earns a few curious looks.

“Tony, huh?” Dum Dum says. “What’s he like?”

Steve’s smile softens immediately.

Amazing.

Brilliant.

Complicated.

Stubborn.

Every word feels too small.

“He’s…” Steve pauses. “He’s the best person I’ve ever known.”

The teasing fades from the table. Because they can hear it in his voice.

The love.

“He makes me laugh,” Steve continues quietly. “Challenges me when I need it. Calls me out when I’m being an idiot.”

“So all the time?” Jim asks.

Steve laughs. “Pretty much.”

“And he puts up with you?” Gabe asks.

“Most days.”

That gets another round of laughter.

Then Steve’s smile grows even wider. “And we just had a son.”

The reaction is immediate.

“What?”

“No kidding?”

“Look at you, Rogers!”

“About damn time.”

Steve can’t stop smiling now.

He reaches into his pocket instinctively before realizing he doesn’t have anything on him.

No phone. No pictures.

Nothing.

His chest tightens unexpectedly. “His name’s Peter,” Steve says softly.

The name settles over the table.

“Peter,” Dum Dum repeats.

Steve nods. “He’s beautiful.”

And for a moment, all he can think about is the tiny baby waiting for him. The little boy he'd fought so hard to meet.

The little boy who doesn't even know him yet.

A strange ache settles in his chest. The first one he's felt since arriving here.

---

Tony listens to every word Helen says, nodding along as he absorbs her instructions and what to do if something happens. He doesn't want to believe anything bad will happen. Peter was okay now. His son could finally go home.

But he knows life can be unpredictable and anything could happen. Peter was so small and dependent on him for everything.

For the first time, the reality of it truly settles over him.

He's somebody's father.

The thought is both terrifying and wonderful.

"Do you have any questions?" Helen asks.

*How am I supposed to do this?*

*What if I screw him up?*

*What if he gets sick again?*

*What if Steve never wakes up?*

Tony swallows hard and shakes his head. "No. I think I got it."

Helen gives him a look that tells him she doesn't entirely believe him. "Tony."

He glances up.

"You're going to be fine."

A bitter laugh almost escapes him. Everyone keeps saying that. Steve's going to be fine. Peter's going to be fine. He's going to be fine.

But none of them seem nearly as certain as they sound.

Once Helen leaves, Tony looks down at the tiny bundle in his arms.

Peter yawns, his tiny face scrunching before relaxing again.

The sight tugs at something deep inside Tony's chest.

"Hey, kiddo."

Peter's little fingers curl around one of his.

Tony feels his throat tighten. "You're supposed to have two dads, you know that?" he murmurs.

Peter shifts slightly in his blanket.

"Your papa was supposed to be here for this." The words come out before Tony can stop them.

A lump forms in his throat.

"He would've been so good at this." Tony smiles weakly as tears sting his eyes. "He already was."

His gaze drifts toward the door.

Toward the hallway that eventually leads back to Steve. Back to the man who still hasn't opened his eyes. Back to the impossible choice waiting for him.

Tony lowers his head and presses a gentle kiss against Peter's forehead.

"I don't know what I'm doing," he whispers.

Peter responds with a tiny sigh, already half asleep.

Despite everything, Tony finds himself smiling. "Yeah," he murmurs. "That's about the answer I expected."

A soft knock on the door captures Tony's attention and he looks up just as the door opens and Natasha appears. His heart skips a beat, a glimmer of hope settles in his chest.

But then she shakes her head and a sad smile appears over her face. Tony's heart sinks.

"I'm sorry I don't have good news," she says, stepping fully into the room. "I came looking for you after I heard what Strange said. Bucky's a mess. But I'm sure you know that already."

"Yeah." Tony nods. Then he heaves out a sigh. "I don't know what to do. Strange is convinced Steve is never going to wake up and I'm wasting my time."

"Do you think that?" Natasha asks.

Tony is silent for a moment as he registers her question. He sighs again. "I don't know. Why hasn't he woken up? He wanted to be here for our son and now Peter gets to come home and Steve isn't here for this. He's missing all of it."

Natasha reaches out and places a hand over his shoulder, rubbing it softly. “I don’t want to give up on him either.”

“But?” Tony presses.

“I hate seeing him like this.” Her eyes shine bright with tears.

“Do you think I should stop? I should let him go?”

“I can’t tell you what to do.”

“I wish someone would.”

Peter stirs in his arms, a tiny sleep sound escapes from his pouty lips. Tony smiles down at him. For the first time since his son was born, he doesn’t feel angry or bitter. It wasn’t Peter’s fault. Peter wasn’t the villain, no matter what Strange thinks.

And Tony would gladly prove it. He would raise Peter to be good, to always do the right thing. It’s what Steve would want.

Natasha watches him for a moment. “He looks like him,” she eventually says. “I see you, too, but he has Steve’s nose.”

“And his stubbornness.” Tony lets out a small laugh.

Natasha reaches out and gently brushes a finger against Peter’s tiny hand. “He’d be proud of you.”

Tony immediately shakes his head. “No.” His voice cracks. “He’d be furious.”

Natasha’s brow furrows.

“He’d hate that I even considered giving up.” The words spill out before he can stop them. “He’d find some stupid way to get out of bed just so he could yell at me..”

A laugh escapes Natasha despite the tears in her eyes. “That does sound like Steve.”

For a moment, he can almost picture it. Steve standing in the doorway looking disheveled and exhausted. Giving him that look. The one that somehow managed to be disappointed and loving at the same time.

The image hurts because it isn’t real.

His smile slowly fades.

“I dont know how to do this without him.” The confession is barely above a whisper.

Natasha’s hand tightens on his shoulder. “You don’t have to.”

Tony looks up at her. “Because he’s going to wake up?”

Natasha hesitates. “No,” she says quietly “Because you’re not alone.”

The words settle over him. It’s not the answer he wants, but maybe the answer he needs.

Peter shifts in his arms, letting out a tiny sigh.

Tony looks back down at his son.

His son.

The thought doesn’t feel foreign anymore. It feels real.

And for the first time since Peter was born, Tony doesn’t feel anger when he looks at him.

Only love. A fierce, terrifying kind of love. The kind that makes him understand why Steve fought so hard to stay alive.

Chapter End Notes

I’m gonna start wrapping this story up. I hate to see it go though! But I promised a happy ending and I intend to keep it!

# Chapter 36

The first night with Peter is one of the hardest things Tony's ever had to do. He was used to staying up late and tinkering in his lab, sometimes starting an occasional fire and having to deal with the aftermath. He's fought aliens from space, took out murder bots and even survived countless other attacks the normal citizen would never encounter in their lifetime.

But none of that compared to the trenches of parenthood. And doing it all on his own, for that matter.

Peter screams for most of the night, refusing to sleep or even sometimes taking a bottle. Tony's tried everything from rocking him to even his sad attempt at singing a lullaby. None of it works.

It's near three in the morning and Tony is at his wits end. He has JARVIS provide any advice when he needs it, but he refuses to call his teammates for help. They had their own lives and were dealing with their own problems. He was the one who decided to become a father.

But not a single one.

"Dammit," Tony mutters when his mind drifts to Steve. "At least you're missing all this."

He means it as a joke, but deep down there's nothing funny about it. Steve was missing this —every cry, every bottle feed, every diaper change. Steve was missing all of it.

It wasn't right. It wasn't fair.

Steve wanted to be a father. He planned for this, dedicated months to prepare and care for their son. He gave up everything just so Peter could be okay.

And now he wasn't even here to experience what he fought so hard for.

Tears sting Tony's eyes and he slips one hand free from his son to wipe angrily at them. Peter's cries begin to die down, turning into little hiccups until finally the nursery is silent.

Tony holds his breath, too scared to make a single move. Peter was calm for the first time in hours. He'd hate to ruin that.

Slowly and carefully, Tony lowers Peter into the crib. Peter's little body jerks, his face scrunching up and a displeased sound escapes his pouty lips. But he doesn't cry, and it doesn't take long for him to drift off to sleep.

Tony finally releases the breath he's been holding. He stares at his son, studying every feature. Natasha had been right about him looking like Steve. He can definitely see the Stark genes coming through, but Steve's fought to be noticed and won in some areas.

Tony reaches into the crib and runs his thumb along Peter's tiny hand. "Sweet dreams, kiddo."

With Peter finally down, Tony leaves the room, but he doesn't dare go to his bedroom. It's not the same without Steve. For years they've shared the same bed. Now it was cold on one side.

Tony plops down on the couch with a tired sigh. He scrubs a hand over his face, begging sleep to come. But it never does. For once in his life he doesn't want to avoid sleep, he welcomes it. It's the only place he can see Steve again.

He lies down and locks his gaze on the ceiling, his ears perked and listening for any sounds that might come out of the baby monitor beside him. Nothing. It's quiet.

But sleep doesn't come. He lies awake, his mind refusing to settle down for the night. He thinks about Steve. It's all he does these days.

Was Steve going to wake up? Was he going to finally experience being a father like he wanted?

Tony wasn't sure. And he hated it.

He could usually figure out the answer. And if he couldn't on the first try, then he'd try again and again until he solved the problem. But this problem was harder to solve. He felt like a failure. He promised to always be there for Steve, in sickness and in health, for better or worse. And yet he couldn't even keep his promise.

He rolls over onto his side, and that's when he notices the piece of paper on the coffee table. The line at the bottom was still blank. Good. It was supposed to be. Tony wouldn't sign it. He can't.

But then he thinks about Steve and how he's trapped to that bed, forced to use magic to keep him alive. Tony's not sure if he's even alive anymore. Strange had said it's all artificial. Steve wasn't even breathing on his own.

It wasn't a good quality of life. Not something Steve deserved.

Steve had always been moving. Always doing something: training, helping people, checking on his friends.

He would even make breakfast at six in the morning because apparently sleeping in was a personal offense.

Tony couldn't imagine Steve wanting to spend the rest of his life trapped in a hospital bed. Unable to move and speak. He would never get to meet his own son.

Tony squeezes his eyes shut. Maybe that was the cruelest part.

Peter was finally home. This was supposed to be one of the happiest moments of their lives. Instead Steve was missing it.

And tomorrow will become next week. Next week will become next month. And eventually Peter would be smiling and crawling. Then he'd be walking and talking. Growing up.

All while Steve remained trapped between life and death.

The thought makes Tony's chest ache.

Because for the first time since Strange handed him the paperwork, he allows himself to consider something he hasn't wanted to think about.

What if Steve wasn't coming back? Not because he didn't want to or because he wasn't fighting. But because he couldn't.

Tony's gaze drifts back toward the coffee table. One signature. That's all it would take.

His stomach twists. He hates himself for even looking at it. Because it feels like a betrayal. Like he's giving up on the man he loves.  He feels like he's breaking every promise he'd ever made.

Yet another part of him wonders if holding on is the real betrayal.

Steve had spent his entire life sacrificing himself for other people. Maybe this was Tony's turn.

Maybe loving Steve meant letting him rest.

---

Tony doesn't miss the way Bruce looks at him when he hands over the paper. The line at the bottom has his signature, scribbled in black ink.

For a moment, neither of them say anything. Bruce takes the paperwork carefully, almost like it might shatter in his hands.

Tony wishes it would. He wishes the paper would burst into flames. He wishes someone would tell him he made the wrong choice. He wishes Steve would wake up and yell at him for even considering it.

Instead, there is only silence.

"Tony…" Bruce starts softly.

"Don't." The word comes out sharper than he intended. Tony drags a hand over his face. "If you tell me I did the right thing, I'm going to punch you."

Bruce's mouth closes immediately. Because there is nothing he can say. No words that will make this easier. No reassurance that will undo what Tony has done.

A decision that will alter the rest of his life.

His gaze drifts toward Steve's room. The glass window reflects the fluorescent lights overhead. Beyond it, Steve remains exactly as he'd been for weeks. Completely still and silent.

Tony's chest tightens. "Can I see him?"

"Of course," Bruce answers. "I'll get Strange. I think the rest of the team should be here…"

Tony doesn't look at him, his eyes still on Steve. "Bucky is going to hate me."

"I think he'll understand."

Tony scoffs, but says nothing. Bruce squeezes his shoulder gently before leaving to find Strange.

Tony moves toward the room and pushes open the door and steps inside.

Nothing has changed.

Steve still lies motionless beneath the blankets. The soft glow of magic surrounds him, keeping his body alive in a way nature no longer can.

Tony swallows the lump in his throat as he approaches the bed. His legs feel heavy, but they somehow carry him toward Steve.

A shaky breath escapes him as he takes Steve's hand. It's warm. He slides his thumb across Steve's knuckles, remembering all the times he's held his hand. He won't get another chance.

"I'm sorry, honey." His voice breaks immediately. "I'm so sorry."

A sob tears through him, raw and ugly. He tries to hold it back, but fails. Weeks of fear, exhaustion, and grief come crashing down all at once. His shoulders shake violently. His chest aches.

And for the first time since all of this began, Tony allows himself to admit what he's been trying so desperately not to believe.

He's losing Steve.

"I don't know if you can hear me," he whispers. His thumb brushes across Steve's knuckles again. "But if you can…"

Another sob escapes him.

"I tried. I tried everything." His voice cracks. "Bruce tried. Helen tried. Even Strange tried."

He bows his head, pressing Steve's hand against his forehead. "I don't know how to save you."

Silence answers him.

"I don't want to do this." The confession is barely audible. "I don't want to let you go."

He lowers his head onto the mattress beside Steve's arm.

For a long moment, all he can do is cry.

---

Over the music and the Howlies laughter, a new sound fills Steve's ears. At first, he can't make out what it is—it sounds like voices, soft whispers in his ear. But it's too soft, too far away. He can't make out the words.

He looks around the dance hall, his eyes roaming over the people dancing, then his gaze falls back to the Howlies. They're laughing about something Jim had said. But Steve didn't catch it. All he can hear is the new voice.

It sounds familiar. It sounds like warmth and safety. It sounds like home.

*Honey, wake up.*

Steve blinks. It only takes a second for his brain to register who's speaking to him.

Tony.

A sharp ache explodes in his chest. It's not painful, just…different. Like a piece of himself he'd forgotten was missing.

Steve slowly rises from his chair.

Across the table, the Howlies continue talking amongst themselves, unaware of the change. Or maybe not entirely unaware. Because when Steve glances at Dum Dum, he finds the older man watching him. He's no longer laughing or smiling. He just watches, as if he knows.

*I don't know how to save you*. The grief in Tony's voice cuts deeper than any blade ever could.

Steve looks around, searching for him, but all he can see is unfamiliar faces. Dancers move across the floor, couples sway to the music. Laughter and cheerful conversation fills the room.

Yet none of it matters. Because one face stands out among the crowd.

Steve freezes, his breath catching in his throat.His mind struggles to make sense of what he's seeing.

“Ma?”

Sarah stands in the middle of the dance hall. A soft golden light surrounds her. It’s not bright enough to hurt his eyes, just warm. Like sunlight through a window on a cold winter morning.

The crowd continues to move around her, yet somehow she feels separate from it all. Like she’s the only person in the room.

Her smile trembles. “Oh, Steve.”

The sound of her voice nearly breaks him.He doesn’t remember crossing the room. One second he’s standing beside the Howlies, then the next he’s in front of her.

And then her arms are around him. Steve feels like a child again—small. He’s safe in her arms. It feels like home.

A sob catches in his throat. His arms wrap around her as tightly as he can and he buries his face against her shoulder.

“Ma.” The word comes out broken.

Sarah holds him without hesitation. One hand smoothing through his hair exactly the way she used to.

“It’s alright,” she whispers.

And for the first time in weeks, maybe even longer, Steve lets himself stop being strong.

The tears come before he can stop them, his shoulders trembling. He clings to her. “I’m tired.”

Sarah’s hand continues its gentle motion through his hair. “I know, Stevie.”

There’s no disappointment in her words. No judgement. Only understanding.Because if anyone knows how hard Steve has fought his entire life it’s her.

Steve squeezes his eyes shut. “I don’t want to fight anymore,” he admits. It’s terrifying to reveal outloud, yet somehow, saying it to her feels safe.

Sarah pulls back just enough to look at him.Her eyes are shining, full of love and pride. But also full of heartbreak.

“Oh, sweetheart.” She cups his face between her hands. “You’ve fought long enough.”

Then her expression softens further. “But that doesn’t mean you’re finished.”

He pulls back slightly to look at her. “I can’t. If I go back…”

“He’s calling for you, Steve. Tony needs you. Your son needs you.”

Steve chokes back a sob and his mother pulls him back into her arms. “You don’t understand,” he whispers against her shoulder.

“I think I do.”

“No.” His grip tightens on her. “I’m tired, Ma. I don’t think I can do this.”

She presses a kiss to his temple. “Oh, sweetheart, I know you can. You’re so strong.”

Steve closes his eyes.

“But you don’t have to be strong right now.”

A fresh wave of tears burns behind his eyelids. Being strong is all he’s ever known to be, even when he wasn’t.

Sarah cups his cheek, forcing him to look at her. “I am so proud of you.”

Steve’s breath catches in his throat.

“Everything you’ve done. Everything you’ve survived.” Her thumb brushes gently across his cheek. “Not because you’re Captain America. Not because of the war. Or the medals. Or all the people you’ve saved.”

Tears sting his eyes.

“I’m proud of the man you became.”

The words settle deep inside him. To her, he’d always just been Steve. Her son. That’s all that ever mattered.

“You never stopped caring about people,” she continues. “No matter how much the world changed around you.”

A tear slips free and trails down Steve’s cheek.

“And now you’ve got a son who is going to need you more than anyone.”

Steve lowers his gaze. “I’m scared.”

Sarah’s expression softens. “I know.”

“What if I can’t do it?”

“You can.”

“How do you know?”

Sarah smiles through her tears.“Because I’ve been watching you prove people wrong your whole life.”

Another sob rips through him. His mother brings him in close while he mourns and says goodbye. This place was beautiful and peaceful. If he stayed he wouldn't be alone. The Howlies are here. And so is Peggy and his mother. Everyone he's spent time missing.

It would be easy to stay. There's no pain here or suffering. Just peace.

"You can't stay, Steve," his mother says. She reaches up and wipes a tear from his cheek. "You know where you belong."

She's right. He doesn't belong here. There's still people waiting for him on the other side. His son, who he hasn't even met yet. His friends. Tony.

He needs more time with them. He hasn't loved them enough yet.

"I love you, Ma."

Her eyes immediately fill with tears. "I love you too, Stevie."

Steve wraps his arms around her one last time, holding on as tightly as he can.

Eventually, he pulls away. The dance hall is fading now, the music growing quieter. The lights begin to dimmer. He can barely make out the Howlies anymore.

But then he sees them standing together. Peggy is smiling. Dum Dum gives him a salute. Jim raises his glass. Gabe winks.

Steve realizes none of them look sad. They look proud. As though they've been waiting for him to figure it out.

Sarah squeezes his hand. "Go home, sweetheart."

The world around him begins to disappear. The dance hall dissolves into light. The music completely fades out until only silence surrounds him.

---

Tony watches as Strange prepares to remove the spell. Bruce and Helen stand nearby, ready to intervene if necessary.

Bucky stands on one side of Steve's bed, his hand tightly interlocked with Sam's. He's trying to hold himself together, but Tony can see the cracks forming. Natasha stands near the door, Peter sleeping peacefully in her arms. The little boy is completely unaware that his entire world is about to change.

Strange glances toward Tony. "Once I remove the spell, there's a chance he won't come back. It depends entirely on whether his body is strong enough."

Tony swallows hard. He knows all of this. He signed the paperwork. He made the decision.

"Just do it." The words nearly break him.

Strange nods, then he raises his hands.The golden magic surrounding Steve immediately begins to fade.

The room falls silent. No one moves. They don't even breathe.

Tony's eyes never leave Steve.

*Please*.

He doesn't know who he's begging anymore. God. The universe. Steve.

The final strands of magic dissolve. But nothing changes. Steve remains motionless. The machines continue their steady rhythm.

Bruce watches the monitors while Helen checks Steve's vitals.

No one says a word. Seconds pass, each one feels like an eternity.

Tony's heart pounds so hard it hurts. "Come on, Steve," he whispers.

Then Steve's heart rate drops. A sharp alarm immediately cuts through the room.

"Bruce!" Helen snaps.

Bruce rushes forward and Strange begins issuing orders.

Bucky lets out a broken sound that doesn't even sound human.Sam catches him before he can collapse.

The monitor continues screaming. Tony's heart plummets. This couldn't be happening. Steve was supposed to wake up.

Tony finds himself moving closer until he's right beside Steve. Strange has already started compressions while Helen administers oxygen. Bruce keeps his attention on the monitors.

Beneath Strange's fingers, a crack echoes through. Tony flinches, his eyes squeezing shut.

This couldn't be how it ended. Not here. Not like this.

"Come on," Tony whispers.

The room has dissolved into chaos. Orders are being shouted, machines are beeping.

Someone is crying.

Bucky. It sounds like Bucky.

Tony can't bring himself to look. All he can see is Steve. Still pale and broken. Still unmoving.

"Come on, honey," Tony pleads, his voice shaking. "Please."

Another compression, followed by another breath. The monitor continues its relentless scream. Flat and unchanging.

Tony's vision blurs with tears.

Strange pulls away, his breathing harsh. He gestures for Helen to stop, and she slowly backs away from the bed.

Nobody moves. They don't speak. The only sound is Tony's ragged breathing.

"Time of death—"

"No." Tony shakes his head violently. Tears stream down his face as he grabs Steve's hand. "No. No. Please."

His fingers wrap desperately around Steve's. His hand is still warm. He can't be gone.

"Steve." A sob catches in Tony's throat. "You can't leave me."

Nobody interrupts. The entire room stands frozen in grief.

Tony leans over the bed. His forehead presses against Steve's arm. "Please. You promised." Another sob tears through him. "You promised we'd do this together."

Someone quietly steps toward him. Tony pulls away from Steve and looks up, finding Natasha. Her eyes are red and tears are flowing down her face.

"Steve should meet him," she says softly.

Natasha gently places Peter in his arms. Tony is crying so hard he can barely hold him, but he takes him and brings him closer to Steve. This might be the only chance Steve ever gets to meet their son.

Carefully, he settles Peter against Steve's chest. The baby stirs slightly, letting out a sleepy sigh before nestling against the hospital gown.

Tony lets out a shaky breath. "Honey, this is Peter. Our son."

He just stares at them. Steve and Peter. Father and son, together at last.

And yet somehow still worlds apart.

"He's got your nose," Tony whispers, brushing a hand through Peter's soft hair. "And he's stubborn as hell."

The room remains silent around him. Tony reaches for Steve's hand and squeezes it.

"I know you'd love him," he says, fresh tears spilling down his cheeks. "You would've been so good at this."

Peter squirms against Steve's chest, making a small sleepy noise.

Tony smiles through his tears. “He needs you, Steve. And so do I.”

Peter’s tiny hand slips free from the blanket. Without thinking, Tony guides it toward Steve’s. Peter’s fingers curl instinctively around one of Steve’s.

And for a moment, nothing happens.

Then Steve’s fingers twitch. Once. It’s weak, but Tony notices.

His breath catches. “Steve.”

# Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

I know this chapter is short but I didn't want to keep you guys waiting!

The room is completely silent, except for the beeping of the machine. Tony nearly collapses when he hears the sound. It doesn't seem real, and he wonders if this is just a dream. But then Steve's hand twitches again, and Tony feels the soft pressure in his hand.

A sob rips from him and he squeezes back, his eyes filling with tears. "Steve, honey, I'm here. I'm here."

Steve's eyes flutter for a second or two, then they slowly open. Steve blinks against the harsh lights overhead. His gaze is unfocused at first, drifting across the ceiling before finally settling on Tony.

Recognition flickers in his eyes.

Tony breaks and a laugh escapes him, tangled with another sob. "Hey," he whispers.

Steve's brow furrows slightly, as if he's trying to make sense of everything. His hand immediately lifts toward his throat.

"Steve, hey, hey." Tony catches his wrist gently. "Don't. Leave it alone."

Panic flickers in Steve's eyes.

Bruce steps forward. "It's okay, Steve. You're in the medbay. You've been sick."

Steve's breathing quickens around the tube.

"Easy," Tony says, squeezing his hand. "I've got you."

Peter emits a soft whimper, the sound doesn't go unnoticed by Steve. His gaze immediately drops to the tiny bundle resting against his chest. His brow furrows and a strained sound escapes him, almost as if he's trying to speak.

"Helen?" Bruce asks.

She steps forward immediately. "He's breathing on his own," she says. "Let's get that tube out."

Tony squeezes Steve's hand. "It's okay, honey. Let her help."

Steve gives the smallest nod. Helen works quickly and carefully. A moment later, the tube is removed.

Steve coughs harshly, his entire body tensing with the effort.

Tony is immediately at his side. “Easy. Easy.”

Steve’s throat is raw. Every breath he takes sounds rough. But they’re his breaths.

Not magic.

Not machines.

His.

Tears immediately fill Tony’s eyes again.

Steve swallows painfully before looking back down at Peter. The baby squirms against his chest and lets out another tiny sound.

Steve simply stares, taking him in. Peter’s soft hair and tiny fingers. His impossibly small face.

The little boy he’d spent weeks fighting to meet.

Another tear slips down Steve’s cheek. “So small,” he rasps. His voice is barely more than a whisper.

Tony lets out a wet laugh. “Yeah. Turns out babies are tiny.”

A small smile appears on Steve’s face. His fingers tremble as he gently brushes against Peter’s blanket.

“Our son?”

The question breaks Tony’s heart. Because Steve knows that Peter’s their son. And yet he doesn’t, not really.  He’d missed so much.

Tony nods. “Our son.”

Steve closes his eyes briefly, as though he’s overwhelmed by the reality of it.

When he opens them again, they never leave Peter. “Hi, Pete.”

Peter responds with a sleepy little sigh and Steve smiles. The first one Tony has seen in weeks.

Steve carefully reaches out for his son, trembling fingers brushing against Peter’s cheek. He looks up at Tony, then he notices the other people in the room. He tries to speak again, but all that comes out is a cough.

“Steve, it’s okay. You don’t have to talk right now,” Helen says softly.

“His heart rate looks good. Blood pressure is normal too,” Bruce says.

Strange moves to Steve’s side. “How are you feeling? Any pain? Just nod.”

Steve nods. “A little,” he manages to get out. “What…happened?”

“You’ve been unconscious for a few weeks. I had to put you under a spell to keep you alive,” Strange replies.

Steve blinks slowly. The words take a moment to register. “A few… weeks?”

“Almost a month,” Bruce says gently.

Steve’s eyes widen and his gaze drops to Peter. The baby shifts against his chest, one tiny hand curled near his face.

A look of devastation crosses his face.

Tony immediately notices. “Hey.”

Steve looks up, his eyes bright with tears. “I missed…so much.”

“You didn’t miss everything,” Tony assures, then a shaky laugh escapes him. “Believe me, kiddo’s going to give us plenty more opportunities to be exhausted.”

A small smile tugs at Steve’s lips before fading. His eyes roam over the room.

Bucky.

Sam.

Natasha.

Bruce.

Helen.

Strange.

Every one of them looks exhausted, but also relieved at the same time. It’s like they’ve been carrying something impossibly heavy.

And then Steve notices the way Tony is holding his hand. Like he’s afraid to let go.

Fear settles uneasily in Steve’s chest.

“What happened?” he asks again, voice rough. “Really.”

Tony swallows hard. “You almost didn’t come back.”

The words hang heavily in the air. Steve's eyes flick toward Strange, then to Bruce.

"You scared the hell out of us," Tony says, his voice trembling.

Steve's fingers tighten weakly around Tony's hand. "I'm sorry."

Tony immediately shakes his head. "No, don't apologize." His voice breaks. "Just… don't do that to me again."

A tear rolls down Steve's face and Tony reaches out to softly wipe it away. Peter whimpers and squirms again, then once Steve rubs his back, he quiets down, dark eyes opening.

Steve cranes his neck for a peek, a smile forming over his face at the sight of his son's face. "Hi, Petey," he say, his voice rough from disuse.

Bucky steps forward then, tears streaming down his face. Tony makes room for him, one hand patting Bucky on the shoulder. The moment Bucky is close enough, Steve holds out a hand for him. Bucky takes it with a sob.

"Hey, Buck."

At the sound of the nickname, Bucky breaks down. He grips Steve's hand tight, almost as if he's afraid Steve would disappear again.

"I thought I lost you." Bucky's voice cracks.

Steve's expression softens. "You can't get rid of me that easily."

Bucky lets out a wet laugh. "Don't ever do that again."

Steve squeezes Bucky's hand. "Till the end of the line, remember?"

Another sob escapes Bucky and he nods. "Yeah."

Steve smiles faintly. "Besides, somebody's gotta keep you out of trouble."

That earns a genuine laugh out of Bucky.

Bucky wipes at his eyes with his free hand. "Pretty sure it's the other way around."

"Depends who you ask."

Bucky looks at Steve for a long moment, relief washing over him. A shaky breath escapes him. "Welcome back, Punk."

Steve smiles weakly. "It's good to be back."

# Chapter 38

Steve can't stop staring at his son. His perfect little boy.

It's only been a couple of hours since he woke up, and he hasn't let go of Peter since then. Strange and Helen both ordered him to rest and take it easy. The serum was slowly pumping through him again, but after months of his body deteriorating, it was going to take some time before he felt like himself again.

He'd make sure to follow their orders. But right now, all he can think about is making up for lost time and bonding with his son.

Peter is sound asleep, wrapped snugly in a blanket and curled up in Steve's arms. Every now and then, he makes a tiny noise or his face scrunches for a moment before relaxing again.

Each little movement captures Steve's attention. As if he's afraid he'll miss something.

"You're so beautiful," Steve whispers, gently stroking one finger along Peter's cheek. "And so perfect."

His throat tightens and his eyes fill with tears.

"Everything I imagined."

He ducks down to press a kiss to the top of Peter's head.

Steve still can't wrap his mind around the thought of having his son. For months he endured so much pain, and had to face many challenges just to bring Peter into the world. But it had all been worth it.

He'd do it all over again if it meant he'd get this beautiful little boy.

Peter shifts in his sleep, his tiny fingers curling around Steve's hospital gown.

A smile spreads across Steve's face.

"Yeah," he whispers, brushing a kiss against the top of Peter's head. "You're worth all of it."

A quiet knock at the door has Steve looking up. The door opens and Tony steps inside. Tony's eyes immediately find Peter, then Steve.

And something warm settles over Steve's chest.

Home.

Not the dance hall.

Not Brooklyn.

Not the place where everyone he'd lost had been waiting for him.

This. His family.

"Hey," Tony says softly.

Steve smiles. "Hey."

"How are you feeling?" Tony asks, stepping closer until he's near Steve's side.

"Better. I know you said I was unconscious for weeks, but somehow I'm still tired."

"Just wait until we get home and this little guy keeps us awake." Tony chuckles and reaches out to stroke Peter's hand.

Steve smiles and rests his head back against the pillows. "I look forward to it."

Tony sits down on the bed. Steve scoots over to make room for him, then once Tony is settled beside him, he rests his head against Tony's shoulder.

Tony turns his head and presses his lips against Steve's temple. "I was so scared," he whispers. "I thought I was going to lose you forever."

Steve carefully slips one arm from around Peter and reaches for Tony's hand.He lifts it to his chapped lips and presses a gentle kiss against his knuckles.

"You're not going to lose me. Not yet." His thumb brushes across Tony's skin. "Not when there's still time to love you."

Tony lets out a shaky laugh and tears immediately fill his eyes. "You giant sap."

Steve smiles. "You married me."

"Yeah." Tony's voice cracks. "Best decision I ever made."

For a moment, neither of them speak. Peter sleeps peacefully between them, completely unaware of the world around him. All he knows is he's safe and warm.

Steve wishes he could keep him this way forever.

Steve." Something in Tony's voice makes Steve look up.

"What is it?"

Tony swallows hard. "I signed it." His eyes immediately fill with tears. "I signed the paperwork. I didn't want to but…I'm so sorry."

Steve stares at him for a long moment. Then his hand tightens around Tony's.

"I know."

Tony blinks. “You know?”

Steve nods slowly. “I heard you saying goodbye.”

A tear rolls down Tony’s cheek. “I’m sorry.”

Steve shakes his head. “No.” His voice is soft but firm.“You loved me enough to let me go.”

Tony breaks, a choked sob escaping him. Steve pulls him closer, resting his forehead against his.

“But I came back anyway. I’m meant to be here. With you and our son. That’s all that matters.”

“I’m glad you came back. I love you so much.”

“I love you, too. More than you know.”

Steve leans forward and softly presses his lips against Tony’s. The kiss is gentle, full of love and warmth. The rest of the world seems to fade away around them. There’s only Tony. The man he loves and will always love.

Steve lingers for a second before pulling back. Their foreheads rest together, neither willing to create much distance.

Tony lets out a shaky breath. “You’re really here.”

Steve smiles softly. “I’m really here.”

Fresh tears gather in Tony’s eyes.

Steve reaches up and brushes one away with his thumb. “I’m sorry I scared you.”

Tony huffs out a laugh. “Scared me?” He shakes his head. “You were unconscious for almost a month. That’s way beyond scared.”

Peter squirms between them, letting out a tiny protest at being ignored. They immediately look down.

Steve’s smile widens. “Looks like someone wants attention.”

“Good luck with that,” Tony says. “He’s inherited your stubborn streak.”

Steve glances down at his son.

His son. His little miracle.

The thought still feels unbelievable. A month ago he wasn’t sure either of them would survive. Now Peter is asleep in his arms while Tony sits beside him.

His family.

His future.

Everything he'd fought so hard for.

Steve presses another kiss against Tony's forehead. Then he looks down at Peter and gently brushes a finger across his tiny hand.

A sense of peace settles over him. Not the peace from the dance hall. Not the peace of letting go. It's something better. Something real.

A knock on the door cuts through the peaceful moment. They both look up right as the door opens and Strange appears. His eyes meet Steve's, then they drop down to the sleeping baby in his arms.

"I won't keep you. I'm sure you're tired and wanting to rest," Strange says, stepping fully into the room.

"I know I'm supposed to, but I'm afraid to go back to sleep," Steve says, and he glances down at his son.

Tony immediately looks at him.

Steve shrugs weakly. "I don't want to miss anything else."

Something softens in Strange's expression. "You won't."

Steve looks up at him.

"The serum is working again," Strange continues. "Your body is healing. I don't expect you'll be needing another magically induced coma anytime soon."

Relief floods Tony's face. Steve smiles, but the expression doesn't quite reach his eyes.Something has been bothering him ever since he woke up.

"Do you still think he doesn't deserve to live?" Steve asks.

The room goes quiet. Tony immediately tenses beside him. Steve feels his fingers tighten around his hand.

Strange hesitates for a moment, then he sighs. "When I first saw the vision, I believed it was inevitable."

Steve glances down at Peter. "The future where he becomes a villain."

Strange nods. "Yes." His gaze settles on the sleeping infant. "I thought your son was the cause of it. I thought if I prevented his birth, I could prevent everything that followed."

Tony's jaw clenches. "And now?"

"Now I think this may have been the timeline that led to it."

Steve's brow furrows. "What do you mean?"

"The vision began after your death."

Steve instinctively tightens his hold on Peter and brings him closer.

Strange folds his hands behind his back. "Peter blamed himself. He believed he was responsible for what happened to you."

"It wasn't his fault," Steve says.

"It was easy to blame himself. You died and he lived," Strange continues quietly. "And afterward, Stark spiraled. He drank and isolated himself. Pulled away from everyone."

Tony looks away, the guilt hitting him hard. After the last month, he knows exactly how close he came to becoming the man Strange is describing.

"Peter grew up believing he destroyed his family before he was even old enough to understand what happened," Strange says.

Steve looks down at his son. At the tiny face resting peacefully against his chest. His beautiful little boy.

"He would've been alone," Steve whispers.

"Yes." Strange exhales slowly. "I spent so much time focusing on the end result that I ignored the cause."

Steve lifts his gaze. "Which was?"

Strange's eyes meet his. "Losing you."

Peter squirms slightly in his sleep, completely unaware of the conversation happening around him. Strange studies him for a moment, then he looks back at Steve.

"When you flatlined today, I thought I was watching that future happen."

Tony's grip tightens around Steve's hand.

For a few terrible seconds, that future had been real. Close enough to become reality. But it hadn't, because somehow, against all odds, he came back.

Strange's gaze drops to Peter one last time. "I'm grateful I was wrong."

Steve looks down at his son. The little boy everyone feared. The little boy who had fought just as hard as Steve to survive.

Slowly, Steve presses a kiss against Peter's forehead. "So am I."

For the first time since entering the room, Strange smiles. A genuine smile.

Strange quietly turns toward the door. Just before leaving, he pauses. “Your mother was right, by the way.”

Steve’s breath catches. When he looks up, Strange is smiling knowingly.

Then he leaves.

# Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A week passes and Steve is cleared to go home. His body still aches in some places, a soreness deep in his bones that he wonders will ever heal. But the pain is just a reminder of what he conquered. It had all been worth it because now he has the most precious thing in the entire world. His son.

Peter is everything and more. He's perfect in every sense of the word. From the top of his head down to his tiny toes. It's clear the Stark genes played a huge role in Peter's features, but the stubbornness and will to fight was something Steve was taking credit for.

Somehow, they both managed to beat the odds that were against them.

Steve has his arm firmly wrapped around the baby carrier. Tony had offered to take their son, but Steve didn't want to be away from him for even a second. He wanted to be the one holding him when they went home together.

Tony is by Steve's side, his hand on the small of Steve's back to help steady him. Walking is easier now after days of trying out his legs, but Tony isn't taking any chances and prepares himself to hold up Steve in case his legs do decide to give out.

"Are you good?" Tony asks. "We're almost there. Just a few more steps."

"I'm okay. I promise," Steve tries to assure, but he knows his husband. Tony was going to hover for a while.

They eventually reach their home and Tony manages to get the door open without even letting go of Steve. He takes Steve's hand, gently leading him through the foyer.

"Bed or couch?"

Steve doesn't hesitate to answer, "Couch."

Tony leads the way, then carefully helps Steve down. "Do you need anything? Another pillow?"

Steve shakes his head. "Just you. Sit." He pats the spot beside him.

Tony lowers himself down beside Steve. The closeness is nice, comforting. Something Steve has been desperately needing. And judging by Tony's response, he's been needing it too. Maybe even a little more.

Peter stirs in the carrier, and Tony works quickly to unbuckle the straps before lifting him into his arms.

“This kid will scream if he’s not held,” Tony says with a fond chuckle. “He’s gotten a little spoiled.”

Steve’s heart sinks. He hates that he needs Tony to explain things about their son. He should know that Peter prefers being held. He should recognize the little sounds that mean he’s hungry or tired. He should know which lullaby calms him down the fastest.

Instead, he’d missed an entire month of firsts. Moments he could never get back.

“Steve?” Tony’s gentle voice pulls him from his thoughts.

Steve offers a small smile. “I’m okay. I want to hold him,” he says, opening his arms.

Tony gently passes their son over and Steve holds him close. He stares down at Peter, looking deeply in his dark eyes. He smiles.

“Hi, Pete. We’re home now,” he says softly.

Peter blinks up at him before letting out a tiny sigh and nestling closer.

Steve closes his eyes for a brief moment.

After everything they’d endured, they were finally home.

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The first day of being home with Peter is unlike anything Steve has had to experience before. Taking care of a baby is nothing like fighting a war, saving the city or wielding the shield. If Steve’s being honest—and he usually is— it’s a lot harder.

Peter, like the people Steve has spent his life protecting, depends on him completely. Every cry means something. Every little sound has a purpose. Caring for him requires patience, gentleness, and an unwavering willingness to put someone else’s needs before his own.

Steve has saved thousands of lives. He has stood between innocent people and danger more times than he can count, always believing that was his purpose.

But as he cradles his son against his chest, listening to Peter’s quiet breathing, something inside him shifts.For the first time in a long time, he doesn’t feel like Captain America.

He doesn’t need a shield.

He doesn’t need a uniform.

He doesn’t need to save the world.

All Peter needs is his dad.

And somehow, that feels like the greatest honor Steve has ever been given.

Maybe this—this quiet life, this tiny family, this little boy sleeping safely in his arms—was what he had been fighting for all along.

Steve rocks gently in the rocking chair of the nursery, softly humming a song he remembers his mother singing to him. It soothes Peter to sleep, just like it had done for him.

His mind drifts to his mother. He can still hear her voice and see her face and bright smile. He can still feel the warmth that radiated from her.

And somehow, after seeing her again, the memories feel more vivid now.

"She would have loved you," he whispers to his son, his fingers gently caressing Peter's cheek.

His throat tightens, the memory of those he lost replaying in his mind.

"So would've Peggy. And the Howlies." Steve smiles through the tears in his eyes. "They would've spoiled you rotten."

He lets out a quiet laugh.

"Your grandma would've insisted you were perfect." His gaze lingers on Peter's peaceful face. "And she would've been right."

Steve presses a gentle kiss to the top of Peter's head.

"I hope I can be half the parent she was."

Peter stirs briefly before settling again, soothed by the steady rhythm of Steve's heartbeat.

A soft knock against the doorframe catches Steve's attention and he looks up. Tony is leaning against the frame, a soft smile on his face.

"Ready for bed or are we camping out here?"

Steve huffs out a laugh. "I was just talking to him."

"Did he say anything in return?" Tony teases.

"Just that his dad is the biggest goofball."

Tony chuckles and pushes himself off the frame, entering the room. "At least he didn't say I was a complete screw up."

Steve frowns. "He'd never think that about you."

Tony says nothing, his eyes looking elsewhere. Steve knows him well enough to know he's avoiding something.

"Tony."

“Let’s just go to bed. Lord knows this kid will be needing us in a couple of hours.”

Tony steps closer, and he gently picks Peter up. Peter stirs for a moment, his face scrunching up in displeasure. Tony softly shushes him as he walks over to the crib.

Peter relaxes once he’s placed down, his face peaceful again. Tony leans over the rail to kiss his head and whispers, “Night, kiddo. I love you.”

Steve rises carefully from the rocking chair and joins him beside the crib. He slips his hand into Tony’s. Together, they watch their son sleep.

“You don’t need to blame yourself,” Steve says softly.

Tony tenses beside him and Steve gives his hand a soft squeeze.

“I signed…” Tony’s breath wavers. “I nearly gave up on you and I’m—god, Steve I’m so sorry. I’m sorry.”

“Tony,” Steve says, his voice firm and Tony looks over at him. Steve’s expression softens and he cups Tony’s face, his thumbs smoothing away the tears he finds on Tony’s cheeks. “I don’t blame you. What happened isn’t your fault. You fought so hard for me.” He looks down at Peter. “For us.”

He looks back at Tony.

“You stayed beside me. You talked to me even when you thought I couldn’t hear you. You held my hand. You brought our son to meet me.”

A tear slips down Tony’s cheek.

“I heard all of it.”

Tony’s eyes widen. “You… you did?”

Steve nods. “I heard you telling me about Peter. I heard you say goodbye.”

Tony’s breath catches.

“And that’s why I came back.”

Tony lets out a broken sob and rests his forehead against Steve’s. “I love you.”

Steve smiles. “I know.”

He presses a gentle kiss to Tony’s lips. They’re forced to break apart when Peter stirs, his tiny arms stretching over his head. They both freeze, ready to jump in if Peter needed them. But the little boy relaxes again and drifts back to sleep.

“I think that’s our cue for bed,” Tony says with a chuckle. “He’ll be up soon.”

“Is it my turn or yours?” Steve asks.

“Mine? Honestly, I’ve lost track.”

Steve smiles and slips his hand into Tony’s, leading him out of the nursery.

Before switching off the light, he glances back one last time.

Peter sleeps peacefully in his crib. Safe and sound.

Tomorrow would bring more sleepless nights, dirty diapers, and countless new challenges.

Steve couldn’t wait.

Chapter End Notes

I have a question. I can end it right here or if you guys want I can do a short epilogue when Peter is older. What do you guys think?

Thank you for reading! 🥰

# Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Here’s the last chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s hard to believe Peter is sixteen now.

Gone is the tiny, fragile newborn who fit so perfectly in Steve’s arms. The little boy who once depended on them for everything had grown into a bright, compassionate young man with a heart far bigger than himself.

Time had a way of slipping by when Steve wasn’t looking.

Some days it felt like only yesterday that he and Tony had brought Peter home from the hospital, terrified they were doing everything wrong. Other days it felt like an entirely different lifetime.

Steve wouldn’t trade a single moment of it.

Not the sleepless nights.

Not the scraped knees.

Not the endless questions.

Not even the gray hairs Peter had undoubtedly caused.

Every moment has been a gift.

Even though Peter was nearly grown now, Steve knew one thing would never change. No matter how old his son became, no matter how tall he grew or where life took him…

Peter would always be his little boy.

Steve's heart clenches when Peter emerges wearing his suit.

It had been a project he and Tony worked on together whenever Peter wasn't busy with school. They'd spent countless evenings in the workshop, making adjustments, and arguing over every little detail until they finally got it right.

At first, Steve had hated the idea of his son having his own suit.

A suit made it real.

It meant Peter was no longer just the little boy who looked up to the Avengers.

He was becoming one of them.

Every instinct Steve had as a father wanted to protect him from the life he knew so well. He knew firsthand what came with being a hero. The sacrifices, the danger, the endless worry that every mission could be your last.

He never wanted Peter to carry those burdens.

But as Steve looked at the young man standing before him, pride slowly outweighed the fear.

Peter wasn't wearing the suit because he wanted fame or recognition. He was wearing it because someone out there might need help.

And Steve realized there was nothing more heroic than that.

"Do I look okay?" Peter asks.

Steve swallows the lump in his throat.

All he can see is his little boy.

The boy with unruly curls, dressed in his favorite Star Wars T-shirt, proudly showing Steve every drawing he made and asking if they could build Legos in the living room.

Now that same little boy was standing in front of him in a superhero suit.

Tony lets out a long whistle. "I think we nailed it, kid. Or should I say you nailed it. This is mostly your work, Pete."

Steve can't see Peter's face beneath the mask, but he knows he's beaming.

"Papa?"

Steve blinks, clearing the haze from his eyes.

He looks at his son, his gaze settling on the white lenses of the mask. But in his mind, he still sees the warm brown eyes that had stared up at him from a hospital bed sixteen years ago.

The same eyes he'd fallen in love with the moment they first opened for him.

“Looks great, bud,” Steve says, his voice thick with emotion.

He’d promised himself he wouldn’t cry. It turns out that promise is just as difficult to keep as all the others he’d made over the years.

Because nothing could have prepared him for this moment.

“It doesn’t look weird?” Peter asks.

Steve smiles. “No.”

He steps forward and places a hand on Peter’s shoulder.

“It looks like someone who’s ready to help people.”

Peter straightens a little at the words.

Steve’s smile grows. “And I couldn’t be more proud.”

“Thanks, Papa,” Peter says as he steps closer and wraps his arms around Steve.

Steve hugs him tightly, his eyes slipping shut as emotion swells in his chest. For a moment, he doesn’t see the young man standing in front of him. He sees the newborn he’d held against his chest. The little boy who had learned to walk while gripping Steve’s fingers. The child who had run into his arms after every scraped knee and nightmare.

“Love you, buddy,” Steve whispers.

“Love you too, Papa.”

“Well,” Tony says dramatically, placing a hand over his heart, “Where’s my hug? I let you use my lab.”

Peter laughs and pulls away from Steve. “Oh, right.”

He walks over and wraps Tony in an equally tight hug.

“Thanks, Dad.”

Tony smiles as he returns the embrace. “Always.”

Peter pulls away first before stepping toward the edge of the tower.

Steve has seen what Peter can do. He’s watched him climb walls, leap between buildings, and swing through training courses with a confidence that still amazes him.

He knows what his son is capable of.

It doesn’t stop his heart from lurching.

To Steve, Peter will always be the tiny newborn who fit against his chest. The little boy who reached for him whenever he was scared.

Now he's standing only a few feet from the edge of Stark Tower, preparing to leap into the unknown.

Tony must sense Steve's unease because he places a reassuring hand on his shoulder and gives it a gentle squeeze.

"He'll be okay," Tony says quietly.

Steve lets out a slow breath. "I know."

He does know.

He trusts Peter.

That doesn't make letting go any easier.

Peter looks back over his shoulder, the white lenses of his mask narrowing into what Steve has come to recognize as a grin.

"You guys ready?"

Tony smirks. "As ready as we're ever going to be."

Steve nods. "Go get 'em, bud."

Peter gives them one last wave.

Then he jumps.

Steve instinctively takes half a step forward before stopping himself.

A web shoots into the sky. Peter swings effortlessly away from the tower, disappearing into the city beyond.

Steve watches until Peter disappears from sight.

"He'll be okay," Tony says again. The reassurance is comforting. "Besides, I have Barnes and Wilson on standby."

Steve turns to look at him, one eyebrow arching. "You got them to agree to that?"

Tony shrugs. "They volunteered."

Steve gives him a skeptical look. "They're really following Peter around the city?"

"Well…" Tony rubs the back of his neck. "I might've implied I'd never sleep again if they didn't."

Steve laughs. “Who’s watching their daughter?”

“Relax,” Tony says with a grin. “She’s with Nat.”

Steve shakes his head, an amused smile spreading across his face.

“You’ve somehow managed to recruit half the Avengers into helicopter parenting.”

Tony looks positively offended. “I prefer ‘strategically overprotective.’”

Steve chuckles and slips his hand into Tony’s. “Poor Peter.”

“Oh, please,” Tony says. “He’s lucky he got me. You would’ve wrapped him in bubble wrap until he was thirty.”

Steve pretends to think about it. “That’s actually not a terrible idea.”

Tony laughs, wrapping his arm around Steve’s shoulder as they both look out over the city.

“Do you ever think Strange was right?” Tony asks quietly. “About Peter?”

Steve watches the city skyline for a long moment before smiling.

“He was wrong about Peter.”

Tony turns to him.

“But he was right about one thing.”

Steve looks out toward the city, searching for the familiar streak of red and blue swinging between the buildings.

“Peter is going to change the world,” Steve continues. “Just not the way Strange expected. He’ll save it.”

They stand together in comfortable silence, watching the city their son had just leapt into.

Sixteen years ago, Steve had fought with everything he had just to meet Peter.

Now he watches him become exactly the kind of person they’d always hoped he would be.

Tony kisses Steve’s temple. “We did good.”

Steve smiles. “Yeah.”

His eyes remain fixed on the skyline.

Chapter End Notes

I’m so sad this one is over 😭 I had such a fun time writing it. But I can officially check it off the list and work on other things or start new fics 😈

Thank you so much for all the comments, kudos, bookmarks; everything! I love you all so much! ❤️

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!